

**THE FAMILY LINKS NURTURING PROGRAMME:  
A REPORT OF A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION  
OF TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

**AUTHOR: VIRGINIA MACNEILL BA PHD FCIH**  
**virginia.macneill@dphpc.ox.ac.uk**

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Nurturing Programme was set up by Family Links in 1997. The Programme is based on four constructs - self awareness and self esteem, appropriate expectations, positive discipline and empathy. It is a structured programme delivered over a ten - week period in school. This is mirrored by a ten week programme for parents who wish to participate. Before teachers can deliver the Nurturing Programme in school, they must attend a two - day Family Links training course. The programme for teachers, parents and children share many similarities in terms of delivery and materials (e.g. Circle Time and role play).

## **ABOUT THE STUDY**

### **THE EVALUATION SOUGHT TO CONSIDER;**

- ◆ The immediate impact of the two-day training course on teaching staff
- ◆ The immediate impact of the ten week Nurturing Programme on participating parents and their families
- ◆ The Nurturing Programme's longer term impact of the Nurturing in the classroom
- ◆ Whether the Nurturing Programme was perceived to be helpful and relevant in schools

The study is based on an analysis of a convenience sample of a series of completed evaluation questionnaires. These were designed and distributed by Family Links to school teaching staff and parents who had attended either the two - day training programme (teachers) or the ten - week Nurturing Programme (parents) as well as to headteachers who had overseen the implementation of the Programme in school. The purpose of the questionnaires was to assess perceptions and experiences of the Nurturing Programme training and delivery. The design of the questionnaires allowed for the collection of quantitative and qualitative information and has been supplemented by material from qualitative interviews with headteachers from a small number of participating schools. The interviews were conducted by the researcher and author of this report. The main limitations are the design and method of data collection.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

Perceptions of the immediate impact of the two - day course on teaching staff.

- ◆ Enhanced team working skills
- ◆ Improved confidence and communication skills
- ◆ Greater empathy with children
- ◆ An experience that uplifted all participants
- ◆ Increased knowledge and understanding of tools and techniques for promoting children's social, emotional and behavioural development

## The immediate impact of the Nurturing Programme on participating parents and their families

Parents were positive about the Programme. They reported:

- ◆ An uplifting experience in a supportive atmosphere
- ◆ A better understanding of family relationships and parenting
- ◆ Improved confidence and communication with their children
- ◆ More positive attitudes towards their children
- ◆ Positive behaviour reinforcing techniques like Choices and Consequences were most successful
- ◆ Time Out and ignoring were least successful

## The Nurturing Programme's longer term impact in the classroom

- ◆ Widespread and regular use of Circle Time but techniques often failed to filter through to other activities in the week
- ◆ Widespread use of class reward systems
- ◆ Perception that it has made a positive difference to the social, emotional and behavioural development of some children

## Perceptions of the helpfulness and relevance of the Nurturing Programme in schools

- ◆ Needs explicit commitment from headteachers and management team for it to work
- ◆ Children understand and positively respond to it
- ◆ Techniques enable a consistent approach throughout the school
- ◆ Empowers children by giving them a common language
- ◆ Headteachers accept that their staff need nurturing as well as The pupils
- ◆ Teachers often find it difficult to make time for it

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

*Emotional and social well-being* is a generic term, defined as 'a holistic subjective state which is present when a range of feelings, amongst them energy, confidence, openness, enjoyment, happiness, calm and caring, are combined and balanced.' (Stewart-Brown, 2000)

There is a growing awareness amongst educationalists, academics and politicians, that there are important links between the social, emotional and behavioural development of children and their ability to thrive in their later years as well - balanced and confident individuals. It has been recognised that poor emotional and social well - being is associated with inequality of opportunity and children with low self - esteem are more likely to underachieve at school and become involved in anti - social activities. One approach to dealing with this has been the introduction of parenting programmes designed to help parents promote their children's social and emotional development, and to cope with children who have emotional and behavioural problems.

Raising children is a challenging task and many parents with children in mainstream school are turning to formal parent training programmes that provide guidance and support. The interest in this form of parental support has attracted a number of systematic reviews of the literature, which have shown that parenting programmes are an effective way of helping children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. (eg, Barlow and Stewart-Brown, 2001).

The home and school are the primary sites of nurture during the early years, and in education circles, the term 'emotional literacy' has been coined to describe the social, emotional and behavioural development of children in schools. In the UK, it has become an important theme in Personal and Social Health Education (PSHE), accompanied by Government policy in the promotion of partnerships between parents and school. However, despite a recognition of the critical role played by schools, there is insufficient teacher education devoted to social and emotional health and well - being (Weare and Gray, 2003. p 74 - 76). Initial teacher training tends to be subject-based and teachers learn skills of lesson planning and targeting, even more so since the introduction of the National Curriculum. Little attention has been paid to the mechanisms for training teachers to deliver the curriculum within the more holistic and nurturing framework of a family - school linked programme.

While the literature has reported a number of different strategies and interventions aimed at promoting the social and emotional well - being of parents and their pre-school and primary school - aged children, it has also revealed important gaps in knowledge about the ways in which teachers, parents and carers can be helped to nurture children's' social and emotional development at home and school. A recent exception is an evaluation of a two-day training course in the delivery of the Family Links Nurturing Programme, which was introduced experimentally to students undergoing initial teacher training for primary schools (Weare and Stratford, 2004). The results were

positive, especially in terms of students' raised confidence levels in managing pupil behaviour and attendance levels.

## 2. THE NURTURING PROGRAMME

### (i) Origins of the Programme

The Oxford - based Family Links (a voluntary agency, established in 1997), has modelled its home-school linked Nurturing Programme on that of Bavolek from the United States. His interest is the development of family education as a means of preventing of child abuse and neglect (Bavolek, 2000; Bavolek, Cornstock and McLaughlin, 1983); Bavolek, Kline and McLaughlin, 1979).

The Nurturing Programme fosters emotional health in individuals, families and schools. Its structured approach increases emotional literacy by building self-esteem and relationship and communication skills. As interest in the implications of childhood emotional experiences on parenting, long term health and brain development (Damasio, 1994) gathers momentum, professionals need to develop expertise in this area.

The Programme comprises a structured 10 - week course relevant to all children and adults responsible for their upbringing. It is fully described in the Parenting Puzzle (Hunt and Mountford, 2003) and relies on a combination of cognitive and affective approaches based on four key principles:

- (i) *Self awareness and self esteem* - being sensitive to and taking responsibility for personal needs enables a more nurturing attitude towards others.
- (ii) *Appropriate expectations* - expectations of children's abilities and behaviour should be tailored according to their age and stage of physical, intellectual and emotional development.
- (iii) *Positive discipline* - positive discipline responds positively to positive behaviour, fairly and reasonably to negative behaviour.
- (iv) *Empathy* - Empathy is the ability to be aware of the needs of others and to value those needs.

Apart from Weare and Stratford, 2004, there have been a number of other studies of the Family Links Nurturing Programme. The findings from Layton's (1996) effectiveness evaluation showed an improvement in children's knowledge of social and assertiveness skills and when to use them appropriately. Later, a qualitative study by Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001), showed that parents who had attended a home - school linked programme (the Family Links Nurturing Programme) reported a greater feeling of support, an increased empathy with other parents, and a better understanding of their role as parents. They also felt they had acquired a repertoire of techniques for anticipating and resolving problems and an improved ability to empathise and identify with their children, including a better understanding of what motivates children to behave in particular ways.

### (ii) Delivering the Family Links Nurturing Programme

The Family Links Nurturing Programme comprises two linked programmes. The first is the ten week programme directed at children within their primary school. For this, Family Links offers an initial two - day training course for teachers and school support staff, followed by a package of ongoing support which is tailored to the needs of the school.

## **SUMMARY OF FAMILY LINKS TRAINING & SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS**

- ◆ Two day induction course
- ◆ Post training refresher days in school
- ◆ Post training observation of Circle Time led by staff
- ◆ Post training Demonstration lessons by Family Links
- ◆ Post training attendance at staff review meetings

The second is a ten - week programme for parents and is also delivered by Family Links. Both programmes are accompanied by a series of handbooks, which give a week by week guide to managing activities in order to achieve programme goals.

### **3. AIM AND SCOPE OF THE REPORT**

The aim of this report is to describe an evaluation of the Family Links home - school linked training. It is a *process* evaluation and does not as such, aim to address the effectiveness of the training programme or its implementation. The evaluation aims to provide an insight into how teachers, support staff and parents have experienced the Nurturing Programme training provided by Family Links, what they value about it and their thoughts on its application within the home and school environment.

### **4. THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **The Evaluation Method**

Over the past five years Family Links has devised and used a range of evaluation questionnaires to obtain written feedback from the adult participants to the programmes. While the content of these questionnaires vary and some were poorly completed, there was sufficient data available in them to conduct a qualitative evaluation. This paper reports on the findings from some of these evaluation questionnaires and family logs.

#### **Sources of Data**

There were two main sources of data.

- ◆ Various evaluation forms devised and delivered by Family Links and completed by teaching and support staff who had attended the two day training course and parents who had taken part in the ten week Nurturing

Programme. The evaluation forms were distributed by Family Links at various stages of the linked programmes.

- ◆ In-depth, qualitative interviews with headteachers of some of the schools involved.

For the purposes of this study, the completed evaluation forms were drawn from schools that had taken part in the training programme during 2002/3, where training had gone well and where the evaluation forms provided fairly comprehensive feedback by the participants.

Some questionnaires were completed by the course participants immediately after the end of the training course (post training evaluation forms) while others were completed by the headteachers (post training questionnaire) some time later. Altogether, 196 teachers and support staff (from ten schools) completed post training evaluation forms and ten headteachers completed training evaluation forms.

A summary of the evaluation forms follows below:

Evaluation forms relating to the two-day training course for school staff:

- (i) Post training evaluation forms, completed at the end of each day by all staff attending the training course.
- (ii) Schools post-training questionnaire, completed by headteachers. This was to ascertain the relevance of the Nurturing Programme and whether the training course met the needs and expectations of the staff.

Evaluation forms completed by 21 parents (from four schools) taking part in the ten -week programme:

- (ii) The Nurturing Programme End - of - Programme Evaluation forms.
- (iii) The Nurturing Programme Family Log, Parents charted their weekly progress in implementing what they were learning.
- (iv) The Nurturing Programme Parents' Weekly Evaluation Form.

Qualitative Interviews and observation:

The author supplemented the material from these questionnaires by conducting in - depth interviews with four headteachers who had implemented the Nurturing Programme within their schools. The author also took part in a two - day staff training course and observed a demonstration Circle Time by a Family Links facilitator at a school that uses the Nurturing Programme.

Profile of the staff and parent participants

There is little known about the participants to the study. The four headteachers who were interviewed for the evaluation were female. The participants to the two-day course comprised teaching and support staff and the participants to the 10-week parent programme comprised parents of children attending the schools.

The evaluation took place between January and July 2004. The headteachers' interviews were carried out by the author of the report.

Data analysis

- (i) The questionnaires

The questionnaires comprised a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, not all of which were answered by the participants. SPSS and Microsoft EXCEL were used to analyse the quantitative questions and manual analysis were used in the analysis of the qualitative material.

(ii) The qualitative interviews

The interviews were partly transcribed and analysed manually as the amount of material for analysis did not warrant the use of N5.

#### Ethical considerations

The collection of information was governed by strict confidentiality procedures. The author had no knowledge of the names and personal details of the staff and parents completing the evaluation forms. The audio taped, qualitative interviews were carried out with the headteachers' informed and written consent and the (partly) transcribed interviews were kept on a coded database. Interview participants were able to discuss any issues arising from the evaluation with the researcher at any time before, during and after the interviews. All tapes and transcripts were stored in a secure environment.

## 5. KEY FINDINGS

The findings are presented in four sections below:

Section one focuses on the perceptions and experiences of teaching staff who attended the two-day training course.

Section two focuses on the perceptions of headteachers of teaching staff who took part in the two-day training programme.

Section three focuses on the perceptions and experiences of parents who took part in the ten - week parenting programme.

Section four focuses on the teachers' and headteachers' perceptions and experiences of implementing the Nurturing Programme in schools.

## SECTION 1:

### TEACHING STAFF: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE TWO-DAY TRAINING COURSE

#### **A brief description of the two - day Nurturing Programme training course for primary school staff**

The schools training programme is an intensive two-day structured course delivered by a Family Links facilitator to teachers and school support staff, who can then deliver the programme to children in their care at school.

Training methods rely on the active involvement of the participants, and topics throughout the two days are carefully chosen so as to explore frameworks relevant to the Nurturing Programme. The facilitator then provides follow-up sessions and demonstration classes at the schools. The Programme gives teachers a range of positive behaviour management techniques that enable them to spend less time and effort controlling the class and more time teaching. The programme matches Curriculum 2000 guidelines for Personal and Social Health Education, provides an introduction to citizenship education, and supports the National Healthy School Standard. The emphasis is on improving emotional literacy and health, developing moral and social responsibility, increasing self-esteem and empathy, improving behaviour, relationship and citizenship skills.

All the activities focus on issues that would be likely to arise during school time and lessons. The activities and discussions are underpinned by the four constructs of empathy, self awareness and self esteem, appropriate expectations and positive discipline.

Modelling activities which can be used in the classroom illustrate how they can be delivered in a way that pupils would find fun.

Key examples include the following:

- ◆ Fun and enjoyment - The idea of fun and self - nurture is an important dimension of the Nurturing Programme. One of the principal messages underlying the training course is that it should be an enjoyable experience. This models the use of incentives (such as a token or marble) in school to encourage children to behave in certain ways.
- ◆ Work breaks – These involve short breaks of physical movement (eg stretching and bending) unrelated to the activities in hand. Work breaks help by breaking down lessons into manageable chunks. This aids concentration and enables children to stay focused on the lesson.
- ◆ Role play, puppets and games – These are used to facilitate learning and are important activities as they offers opportunities for children to model good behaviour.
- ◆ Circle Time - This is a weekly class session which focuses on activities that foster social and emotional development. [The approach underpins positive interactions between children and teaching staff and is used to build relationships where all children feel valued and respected.](#)

- ◆ Choices and Consequences - This is about taking personal responsibility for behaviour by understanding the link between choice of action and consequence.
- ◆ Time Out – This is a form of ignoring undesired behaviour by removing children from the class or group for a short time to give them a chance to calm down and reflect on their behaviour.
- ◆ Praise – This is for behaviour that the teacher wants to promote.

## THE END OF COURSE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

All teaching staff on the two-day training course completed an End of Course Evaluation Questionnaire at the end of each day. The findings in this section are based on an analysis of a sample of these completed post course evaluation questionnaires (196n). It is important to bear in mind that, in common with most training evaluation questionnaires, the data is incomplete as the participants did not answer every question.

The questionnaire comprises five questions (see table below). Question 1 and 2 ask about the participants' satisfaction with the course, using a 5 - point scale response. The remaining questions 3 -5 invite a qualitative response, asking what the participants find most or least enjoyable and most or least useful, and also ask for comments or suggestions for change.

<b>End of Course Evaluation Questionnaire</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think of this session?</li> <li>2. What do you think of the programme now?</li> <li>3. What did you find most enjoyable or useful about the session?</li> <li>4. What did you not enjoy or find useful?</li> <li>5. Are there any changes you would like to suggest or other comments you have?</li> </ol>

In the sample questionnaires, the qualitative responses to these questions were of varying length and depth but they formed a clear and coherent group of substantive and abstract themes.

### **Satisfaction with the Training Course**

The first two questions asked what teaching staff thought of the session and the programme as a whole. An analysis of the responses on each of the two days shows that at the end of Day One, an overwhelming majority (91%) of the 196 participants in the sample rated the session as good or great. By the end of Day Two, this increased to 95% (See table 1 below).

Table 1

<b>Day 1: What teaching staff (196n) thought of the session</b>		
	Number of responses	%
Unsure	10	5.1
Adequate	7	3.6
Good or great	179	91.3

By the end of Day Two, this increased to 95%. (See table 2 below).

Table 2

<b>Day 2: What teaching staff (196n) thought of the programme</b>		
	Number of responses	%
Unsure	1	.5
Adequate	2	1.0
Good or great	186	94.9
Not recorded	7	3.6

The comments below represent a typical response from the participants:

*“The whole two days were great. Yesterday was good but today was great. It was amazing the way we came together. It would be brilliant to see this change in the children too”.*

The consensus was that:

*‘Even better than yesterday. Group dynamics really developing. I feel that I really know all members of staff much better.’*

### **What teaching staff found most enjoyable or useful**

According to Bavolek *“Learning is both cognitive and affective. To be effective, education or intervention must engage the learner on both the cognitive (knowledge) level and the affective (feeling) level”.*

Responses to this question focused on what the participants gained from the two-day course and focused on two types of gain: what they had learnt, (cognitive or knowledge based) and what they had experienced (affective or feelings based).

Most of the responses covered a mix of both.

#### **(i). Cognitive (knowledge based) gains**

This response reflected the knowledge that the school staff had gained about activities and topics they could use in the classroom. Table 3 below shows the number of times that each activity was mentioned by the 196 participants.

Table 3

<b>Cognitive (Knowledge Based) Gains</b>	
Activities	Frequency of comment
Circle Time	35
Games (eg workbreaks, parachute)	23
Role Play	20
Ice Breaker	5
Choices & Consequences/ I' Statements	7
Nurturing Wheel	2
Rewards Chart	1
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMENTS</b>	<b>93</b>

The participants appreciated the course for its practical application in the classroom. Overall, participants reported development of their teaching skills and greater confidence in the use of Circle Time. They felt they had learnt new and innovative approaches to teaching and ways of engaging with the children. However, while participants were, on the whole, enthusiastic about the potential of the course, on a less positive note, some were concerned about how they would fit the Nurturing Programme into their already heavy workload.

### **(ii) Affective (feelings based) gains**

Affective responses reflected how the participants felt about the two day training and featured prominently in their responses to the qualitative questions in the End of Course Evaluation Questionnaires. A striking element was the effect on the participants emotional well - being (see table 4 below). Indeed, 146 entries mentioned some aspect of their emotional reaction to the Nurturing Programme training activities. This was clearly perceived to be an important factor in the success of the course.

Table 4

<b>Affective (Feelings Based) Gains</b>	
Experiences	Frequency of comment
Bonding with colleagues	38
Having fun	20
Sharing experiences (emotions and memories)	35
Empathising with children	15
Feelings of greater personal insight	10
Relaxation, calmness & time to reflect	20
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF COMMENTS</b>	<b>138</b>

Affective gains arose from the following experiences:

◆ Bonding with colleagues

This was felt to be a key driver of satisfaction with the course. The capacity of the course to facilitate effective team working was noted by at least 38 of the participants. By the end of the two days, they had developed real friendships and a sense of comradeship.

*‘Good to have a laugh with all my colleagues in a ‘non-school’ situation.’*

Some observed that such bonding was not possible in school because organisational and time constraints during their working week meant that teachers often only meet at break time and even then it may be infrequent.

*‘Work with people I don’t normally come across during the school day’.*

This prevented them from developing relationships with their colleagues at school. It was further compounded by the heavy demands of the national curriculum.

The response below suggests they understood that experiences of bonding and its links with confidence were the same for a child or adult.

*‘Talking together about feelings, which is often very difficult. A lot of the time is needed to become confident with this as a child but also as an adult.’*

◆ Having fun

Having fun is a central element of the Nurturing Programme and many of the teacher entries focused on their enjoyment of the course as a whole.

*'It was fun. Thought provoking and there are strategies that I can use at home to reduce my own stress levels. '*

◆ Sharing Experiences (emotions and memories)

The evaluation questionnaires showed that some of the activities raised difficult emotions and memories for the participating teachers. However participants commented on the facilitator's skill in creating a comfortable learning environment and how she offered encouragement to all participants. While some of the more reticent members of the group initially felt apprehensive about taking part in role play, by the end of the two days, most had overcome their reluctance. This suggested that the supportive atmosphere and unpressurised environment had made it safe for them to join in. The participants had been able to withdraw if they felt uneasy about any activity or subject matter and this gave rise to discussions about ways of handling difficult behaviour or sensitive issues in the classroom and allowing children to make their own choices and understand the consequences.

◆ Empathising with children

They felt greater empathy towards children and several wrote of how they would change their teaching practices to incorporate a more empathic environment in the classroom.

*'Realising just how difficult it is to be a child and how much of an impression your behaviour can make.'*

◆ Feelings of greater personal insight

Several teachers reported how they had gained greater sensitivity to the feelings of children because of their own discomfort in taking part in some of the activities. For example:

*'I did not enjoy or find it easy to get into a line A-Z of our names. It was very useful to be in a situation that children are often in.'*

Several pointed out that this greater insight would assist them in managing behaviour in the classroom.

*"Very wary at first that I might feel pressurised to participate but this was actually insightful as it has made me look at things from a child's perspective.'*

*'Recognition of effects of praise and criticism. Importance of self esteem.'*

*'Thinking about choices and consequences ties in with my work focus-helping carers and children become confident self aware learners. I am passionate about the need to help carers support their child to develop critical thinking and emotional literacy.'*

*'Felt comfortable sharing ideas, made you think about why things such as praise etc are so important and why negativity is detrimental. Reinforced ideas.'*

◆ Relaxation, calmness and time to reflect

There were opportunities for the individual and group to reflect on classroom challenges as both facilitator and other participants provided suggestions for dealing how to deal with them. Participants spoke of the many opportunities for the group and individuals to reflect on problems and consider strategies for their resolution. They stated that they appreciated the opportunity to try out the skills they had just learnt and join in a supportive constructive feedback session.

Several commented positively on the fact that the facilitator had encouraged them to discuss professional concerns or problems while the facilitator joined small and whole groups as observer and helped to provide feedback.

### **What the teaching staff did not enjoy or find useful**

The teachers were also asked what they did not enjoy about the course and what they did not find useful. This question generated remarkably few negative responses. While a few comments reflected challenges to the emotional comfort of some of the participants, most criticisms centred on the length of the course and the venue.

The main criticisms are outlined below:

#### **◆ Feeling exposed**

Not everyone engaged equally with the programme and individual tasks. Some felt uncomfortable talking about themselves and several said they had felt rather '*inadequate*'. The phrase '*being put on the spot*' was frequently used to describe fears or concerns about being asked difficult or sensitive questions in front of their colleagues. Two participants did not like taking part in role play for this reason. It was also clear that some participants had begun the training course with some trepidation about what to expect and what was to be expected of them. This was articulated by one participant who felt on Day One that:

*'I was wary that I might be pressurised to participate'*

However by Day Two the participants was much happier, stating

*'I found this not so.'*

#### **◆ The length of the course**

A small number of criticisms focused on the training course itself. Some felt it was too long and that sustaining concentration had been difficult. One participant put this in a different way, stating that it would have had more impact if it had been spread across three days rather than two as there was '*a lot to take in, in two days*'. A small minority did not feel that they learnt very much from the course.

#### **◆ The physical conditions at the training venue**

The Nurturing Programme training course is delivered in a variety of venues and settings, often in the school that has commissioned the training but sometimes in a convenient location to the participating schools. Several participants commented that the physical surroundings had affected their personal comfort and ability to concentrate fully on the course. For some it was the room temperature - it was either too hot or too cold. For others, the seating arrangements left something to be desired, especially if it meant sitting on the floor for a long time.

### **Teaching staff suggestions for change and other comments**

#### **(i) Suggestions for change**

The suggested changes were about length of the course or physical surroundings which are outlined in the previous paragraph.

## **(ii) Other comments**

The course was delivered by a Family Links trained facilitator. It was perceived to be clearly structured so that the teachers' expertise, skills and knowledge was respected and understood. The consensus was that the facilitator's interpersonal skills and professional knowledge were important factors in their overall satisfaction with the course. She was described variously as '*respectful*', '*professional*' and '*sensitive*' and most participants heaped praise on her for her knowledge and enthusiasm and for encouraging the participants to voice their concerns and questions.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Teaching staff: perspectives and experiences of the two-day training course**

#### **The immediate impact of the two-day training course on teaching staff**

The participants had fun. It was an uplifting experience for all.

They understood and accepted the principles of the Nurturing Programme.

They bonded with their colleagues in a relaxed atmosphere.

They learnt new and innovative techniques and activities for managing the class.

Some of the activities struck an important emotional chord. By reflecting on how they felt about some of their own educational and childhood experiences they were more able to empathise with the children in their care.

#### **Main criticisms of the training course and areas for improvement**

Some felt the course was too long or too short. Some complained of physical discomfort (seating arrangements and room temperature) which affected concentration and enjoyment.

## SECTION 2:

### THE HEADTEACHERS' ASSESSMENTS OF THE TWO-DAY TRAINING COURSE

Apart from the End of Course Evaluation forms completed by the course participants, head teachers from the 10 schools in the sample completed a post training questionnaire in which they reported their perceptions of the course and how it was received by their staff members.

#### THE POST TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

##### **Presentation of the training programme**

There were glowing reports from all head teachers with regard to the presentation of the training programme and the Nurturing Programme as a whole. It was agreed that the trainer was an extremely good and knowledgeable facilitator as she was 'hands-on' and sensitive to some of the difficult issues facing some of the participating staff. Both teaching and non-teaching staff felt confident enough to contribute and felt that their contributions were valued.

All the headteachers reported that the course had met or exceeded their own expectations and that although there had been a mixed reaction from a small minority of teaching staff, most of the feedback from them had been positive.

*'One or two said they didn't enjoy it. Most felt it was worthwhile, positive and excellent for team building'.*

According to the headteachers, some of the teachers had felt an initial apprehension about taking part but that this was probably because they did not know what to expect from the course and their role in it, however

*'They soon warmed to the style of training and the philosophy behind it'.*

Head teachers were especially appreciative of the strategies for making children responsible for their own behaviour. Choices and Consequences was singled out by all the headteachers as being particularly relevant. However the headteachers were unanimous in stating that all the topics covered during the training session were important and needed to be explored, although some reported that certain members of their staff had been troubled by some of the issues raised. For example, elements of a discussion on bereavement had been quite raw for some, and

*'Some probing questions about what we expect from children and what we do ourselves perhaps touched a nerve.'*

However, as one of the headteachers pointed out, personal circumstances would have played a part in their reaction to difficult topics.

##### **Rapport amongst staff**

On the whole, head teachers felt that the two day training course had improved rapport amongst staff in the school and the following comment

echoed the end – of - course responses made by the teaching staff on the course:

*‘A rare experience to be with all staff in a relaxed and informal setting’.*

They were generally enthusiastic about the opportunity the course had given them to spend time getting to know each other on a more personal level. The course members usually include a number of support staff and lunchtime supervisors and one head teacher commented on how beneficial it had been to involve them in

*‘What the school is trying to do and how we are doing it’.*

### **Consistency of approach**

The Nurturing Programme places great emphasis on consistency of approach throughout the school and, while most head teachers pointed out that their school already had a consistent approach; they also observed that the training had reinforced its importance and in some cases it had enabled a review of practice.

### **Empathy towards children**

Most head teachers felt that their staff were already empathic towards the children but several commented that the course had

*‘Helped staff develop an understanding about how we can all contribute to helping troubled children by developing a consistent approach’.*

Most schools have their share of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and it was felt that the training had given staff the language and an increased understanding and confidence in dealing with the issues they were being presented with.

### **Self nurture and support for teaching staff**

Family Links consider the emotional well-being of staff to be as important as that of the children they teach and the Nurturing Programme is centred on the construction of a nurturing and supportive environment in order to achieve the following:

- ◆ To alleviate workplace stress
- ◆ To foster self-esteem
- ◆ To show that they are valued
- ◆ As part of a team building and supportive environment

One of the most enduring messages to emerge from the training programme is the need for self-nurture. Head teachers felt that this was extremely important although they were more hesitant about how they could ensure that their staff felt nurtured. All of the head teachers commented on how the course had helped remind them of this although, as one head teacher said

*‘My priority as a head is to remind staff to look after themselves. This is a difficult task when teaching is such a demanding and stressful job’.*

Several others were planning or had already initiated practical ways of nurturing their staff, from creating a 'buddy' system, to ensuring

*'We're all being very kind towards each other'.*

One of the positive training outcomes was that it had heightened head teachers awareness of those teachers who needed extra support in implementing the Nurturing Programme. In such cases the head teachers were offering extra support.

### **Fun and enjoyment**

One of the key objectives in the presentation of the training programme is that it should be an enjoyable event for the participants. All head teachers agreed that everyone had been relaxed and had fun in taking part in the activities:

*'Particularly in the second session when everybody started to loosen up and talk freely'.*

The final word has to go to the headteacher who said:

*'It is the best value staff training I have ever experienced. It has transformed our school-a different school-more fun, more love, a stronger team.'*

## SUMMARY

### Head teachers' Assessment

The training is essential in enforcing the nurturing ethos in School.

The participants feel valued.

The training highlighted the importance of nurturing staff.

Feedback to headteachers has flagged up the need to give some teachers extra support.

The trainer is an extremely good and knowledgeable Family Links facilitator.

The training is good value for money.

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## SECTION 3:

### PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES & EXPERIENCES OF THE 10 - WEEK NURTURING PROGRAMME

#### **A brief description of the ten-week Nurturing Programme for parents**

The Family Links Nurturing Programme for parents encourages parenting education and parent involvement in schools. The parents follow a ten-week course, led by an experienced facilitator. Each session lasts two hours and mirrors the course followed by the children at school. The main purpose is to explore the principles of the Nurturing Programme, how it is implemented in school and to provide a positive and supportive environment in which parents can share experiences of parenthood and learn different ways of tackling difficult issues that may arise at home and in school. The sessions for parents are summarised below:

#### *Session One:*

An introduction to the Four Constructs that provide the building blocks for positive, constructive relationships and confident parenting – self awareness and self esteem; appropriate expectations; empathy and positive discipline.

#### *Session Two:*

Praise and criticism, discipline and Time Out.

#### *Session Three:*

Family rules, rewards and penalties.

#### *Session Four:*

Personal power, self-esteem, choices and consequences.

#### *Session Five:*

Feelings; communication.

#### *Session Six:*

Kinds of touch; nurturing ourselves.

#### *Session Seven:*

Ages and stages in children's development; helping children grow up.

#### *Session Eight:*

Issues around sex; helping children stay safe.

#### *Session Nine:*

Behaviour to ignore, problem solving and negotiating.

#### *Session Ten:*

Emotional health.

The concepts of the Nurturing Programme for attending parents are discussed in the context of each parent's personal history. This is because it is believed that parenting patterns are learnt in early childhood and replicated later in life when children become adults. Understanding history, then, plays an important role in changing parenting patterns of behaviour.

Participation in the Nurturing Programme is voluntary and offered to about ten parents at a time. The findings in this section are based on data obtained from various evaluation forms completed by 21 participating parents whose children attended three different primary schools in Oxfordshire.

The parents' evaluation forms analysed for this section include:

(i) The Weekly Evaluation Form, completed by participating parents at the end of each weekly session.

(ii) The Family Log, completed by participating parents at Week Five and Week Nine of the Nurturing Programme.

(iii) The End of Programme Evaluation Form, completed by participating parent at the end of the ten week Nurturing Programme.

## THE WEEKLY EVALUATION FORMS

The Weekly Evaluation Forms were handed to parents to complete at the end of every weekly session. Overall, the answers to the questions reflect the parents' positive attitude to the Nurturing Programme

<b>The Parents' Weekly Evaluation Forms</b>
1. How do you feel about today's session?
2. How do you feel about the programme?
3. What did you find most enjoyable or useful about the session?
4. What did you not enjoy or find useful?
5. Are there any changes you would like to suggest or other comments you have?

### Parents' feelings about the individual sessions and the Nurturing Programme overall.

These questions asked how the parents felt about the session they had just attended and how they felt about the Nurturing Programme overall. Week by week there was little difference in the response to these two questions, with the overwhelming majority feeling good or great about both the session and the Programme (see table below).

An overview of all the responses over the nine weeks show that on average 96% felt the weekly sessions were good or great and when parents considered the Programme as a whole this increased to an impressive 99%.

Table 5

<b>Parents' (21n) feelings about the sessions</b>	<b>Parents' (21n) feelings about the Programme</b>
Good 62%	Good 53%
Great 34%	Great 46%
Unsure 4%	Unsure 1%

### What parents found most enjoyable or useful about the session

Each of the nine sessions focused on a separate but related Nurturing Programme topic. This question gave parents an opportunity to comment on what they had absorbed from

the sessions and how they linked what they had learnt with their own past and current family circumstances. The quotations are examples of what the parents had taken from each session.

**Session One** was an introductory session about positive, constructive relationships and confident parenting – self awareness and self esteem; appropriate expectations; empathy and positive discipline. The general consensus was that parents:

*‘Discovered we all experience similar problems and want similar results.’*

**Session Two** focused on praise, criticism, discipline and Time Out.

*‘How criticism makes you feel. The various methods of discipline.’*

**Session Three** focused on family rules, rewards and penalties. It helped parents to

*‘Think in a focused way about Time Out and how to use it appropriately and also to think more creatively about rewards and linking them with rules.’*

**Session Four** focused on personal power, self-esteem, choices and consequences. In the words of one parent:

*‘Thinking of children as whole people with their own feelings and agendas’*

A comment from another parent (below) shows how the parents are able to make links with the Programme their children are following at school.

*‘Exploring personal power-my children use this term at home and I’ve never been quite sure what it meant.’*

**Session Five** focused on feelings and clear communication and enabled parents to compare their own behaviour with that of their children.

*‘Comparing what we do when we feel angry with how we expect our children to deal with anger was illuminating.’*

**Session Six** focused on kinds of touch; nurturing ourselves. One parent said: *‘This session was the most difficult yet the most enjoyable – the realisation that I’m not the only one who feels and does things.’*

Knowing that others shared similar thoughts and actions was important and comforting to many parents. Judging by some of the comments, some parents recalled unsettling childhood experiences and were now able to understand how these can be patterned from one generation to the next.

*‘Reviewing events in my childhood and how they are passed on through me to my children’*

**Session Seven** focused on ages and stages in child development; and helping children grow up. There was an appreciation of how the individual sessions were part of the whole Nurturing Programme concept and parents were starting to relate them all to their own family circumstances:

*'Being aware of what is realistic and unrealistic to expect from children of different ages.*

**Session Eight** focused on issues around sex and helping children stay safe. This could have been a difficult topic for many parents because sexuality is often regarded as a taboo subject; however parents were very positive about the discussions:

*'Learning to deal with children's questions about sexuality. Ideas from other mums were brilliant.'*

*'Helping children to stay safe. Their certain areas are private and theirs and only touched with their permission.'*

**Session Nine**, the final session, focused on behaviour to ignore, problem solving and negotiating, which one parent summarised as

*'Thinking through a problem and planning how to deal with it.'*

## SUMMARY

### Parents' Weekly Evaluation Forms

What these responses tell us is that week by week, parents wholeheartedly embraced the ethos of the Nurturing Programme and could translate the ideas into action for implementation at home. They enjoyed sharing ideas with other parents and, by thinking about their own childhood experiences they were able to see how they could prevent history from repeating itself.

### What parents did not enjoy or find useful?

This question elicited a small number of replies, which suggests that there were few dissatisfied participants. Interestingly, the reason given by many parents for not enjoying some of the sessions was that they had been made aware of their own less than perfect parenting behaviour. Guilt about smacking was a particular issue for six parents and a typical comment was:

*'I found the session on hurting difficult. I feel bad about the times I've smacked my daughter and didn't enjoy dwelling on it, though I'm sure it was good for me.'*

Labelling behaviour also struck a chord with several parents.

*'Thinking about how I label my children is hard and uncomfortable.'*

### Parents' comments and suggestions for change

There were some minor suggestions for change which included providing comfier chairs and changing the start time, which was inconvenient for some. Some parents also commented that some of the topics within a session had overrun. However it is important to bear in mind that these suggestions were

not about fundamental aspects of the Nurturing Programme or its delivery. Several parents commented on how much they had appreciated certain aspects of the course and the following comments illustrate the wide range of needs that had been satisfied. Practical obstacles can make it difficult for parents to attend any event but this had been taken care of:

*'Thank you for arranging my child care – it makes a big difference.'*

Sharing new knowledge with partners was also much appreciated.

*'My husband takes on board all that I relate to him and has been able to change some of his own views – a great achievement and one he is proud of (I'm proud of him too).'*

While most of the findings from an analysis of the Weekly Evaluation Forms are based on a small number of comments from parents, it is clear that the parents attending the Nurturing Programme were attentive and interested in the ideas contained in it.

## **THE FAMILY LOG**

*(Completed at Week Five and Week Nine of the Nurturing Programme)*

During the course of the 10 - week programme, parents were also asked to reflect on their progress in implementing the Nurturing Programme at home and record their experiences in a Family Log at Week Five and Week Nine. The sample contained Logs kept by 29 parents from 3 different schools although completion of the logs was patchy and not all parents completed both Week Five and Week Nine. For the purposes of this report, only those Logs which have entries at Week Five and Week Nine have been analysed.

Parents responded to five questions

<b>The Family Log</b>
1. How are your children changing?
2. How are you changing?
3. How is the family as a whole changing?
4. Which Nurturing Programme techniques do you find most useful?
5. Are there any techniques you find difficult or think are not working?

The Family Logs show that the families had been trying out the techniques they had learnt.

### **Parents' perceptions of how their children were changing**

Eight parents answered this question at Week Five and Week Nine and while all the responses were positive there was not much difference between

responses for the two separate weeks. An example of this is that at Week Five, one parent stated that her child was more secure and at Week Nine she was more confident. Another parent said that at Week Five her child was more confident and at Week Nine she was more independent.

It is probably quite difficult for a parent to assess changes in their child's behaviour over such a short period of time, especially when the parent is learning new ideas about parenting at the same time and trying to put them into practice.

### **Parents' perceptions of how they were changing**

Parents had much less difficulty answering this question although fewer (6 parents) actually tackled it. What is interesting about their responses is that at week 5, their comments centred on their growing understanding and awareness of parenting styles and behaviours but by Week Nine they were they were starting to apply their newly gained skills. An example of this is the parent who said at Week Five:

*'I'm more aware of many things I was doing or saying wrong.'*

By Week Nine she said:

*'I try to listen to my children & to communicate better by feelings and needs. I'm trying to focus on what they are doing well.'*

### **Parents' perceptions of how the family was changing**

While parents made positive statements about changing as a family, there was no significant difference in what they said at Week Five and at Week Nine. An example of this is the parent who said at Week Five:

*'We are much more aware of praising each other and respecting each other.'*

At Week Nine she said:

*'We are functioning much better as a family and learning to praise each other more often.'*

Once again, while the Family Log is a very valuable tool for self reflection, it is not very useful for assessing the impact of the the Nurturing Programme.

### **The Nurturing Programme techniques that parents found most useful**

The techniques that parents found most useful were Choices and Consequences, Praise and Rewards (see table below). Time Out was regarded as the least useful technique, mentioned by only one parent.

The Family Logs show that the parents were trying hard to put what they had learnt into practice. One parent said:

*'I need to work harder on not always blaming my children.'*

Another said that she was focusing on how it feels to be shouted at as a child.

Table 6

Techniques parents found most useful		
	Times mentioned at Week 5	Times mentioned at Week 9
Choices & Consequences	3	5
Praise	4	5
Rewards	5	3

The data from the Logs indicate that by Week Nine of the course, some parents appeared to be more thoughtful about the value of what they had learnt and had absorbed the underlying messages of the Nurturing Programme. For example, one parent had found the 'official' version too difficult to implement and had therefore adapted it for her family:

*'I like Choices and Consequences but find the official way a little wordy so we use an abridged version.'*

Another said

*'Thank you so much for the 'sex' talk. It has helped so much and I feel so much closer to my daughter.'*

### **Techniques that parents found difficult or didn't think were working**

The findings to this question correspond to those of the previous one as techniques parents found difficult or did not work were the same ones that they found least useful. 'Time Out' was perceived to be the most difficult to implement at Week Five and Week Nine. Ignoring behaviour was also difficult for some parents and some parents found praising themselves particularly hard

*'Time out – we've had problems with but are trying with it as a last resort. I also find praising myself and me - time really hard.'*

Interestingly, while most parents found Choices and Consequences the most useful technique, it could be difficult to implement in the form presented to them, so a few parents had adapted it to suit their own needs:

*'The Choice and Consequence is quite long - winded and hard to do on the spur of the moment, we do our own adaptation, which does seem to work'.*

## SUMMARY

### Family Log

Parents found Choices and Consequences and praise most useful.

Parents found Time Out and Ignoring Behaviour least useful and most difficult to implement.

Parents valued the ethos of the Nurturing Programme.  
An analysis of Family logs did not reveal any dramatic changes between Week Five and Week Nine.

## END OF PROGRAMME EVALUATION FORM

At the end of the ten week programme, parents completed a Parents' End of Programme Evaluation Form

<b>The Parents' End of Programme Evaluation Form</b> <i>contained questions about:</i>
1 The atmosphere in the parent group
1. The helpfulness of the Nurturing Programme
2. How confident parents were in using the Nurturing Programme techniques
3. Whether they would recommend the Nurturing Programme to other parents

The following findings are taken from the End of Programme Evaluation Forms completed by three parents groups (a total of 21 parents).

### **The atmosphere of the group**

There were positive remarks from all the parents about the atmosphere in the group. The range of positive comments included comments on delivery of the Programme:

*'Everything was clearly explained.'*

What emerged very strongly was the camaraderie and support of the parents.

*'We've gelled together really well. Lovely, honest people. I felt at total ease and safe.'*

The parents' sheer enjoyment in taking part in the Programme came across very clearly

*'Easy going and great fun.'*

One parent, who had clearly been stimulated by being part of the group, apologised for *'Talking too much'*.

These comments emphasised the value parents placed on talking and learning from other parents. It was extremely empowering for them to share challenging parenting experiences and solutions.

## Techniques and attitudes

### (i) The helpfulness of the programme

The parents were asked to rank the helpfulness of individual aspects of the Nurturing Programme. The table below shows that most of the 21 parents in the sample regarded 'praise', 'honouring feelings', and 'listening and talking' as the most helpful parenting tool and 'time out' the least helpful parenting tool.

Table 7

<b>Helpfulness of the Nurturing Programme</b> (on a scale of 1-5 where 1= not helpful and 5= very helpful)						
<b>SCALE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>No Reply</b>
Praise				2	19	
Boundaries & family rules			1	10	9	1
Rewards/penalties			1	7	11	2
Choices & Consequences			2	2	16	1
Time Out	2	2	5	4	7	1
Honouring feeling				2	19	
Listening/talking				3	18	
Problem solving				4	15	2
Ignoring behaviour		1	4	1	12	3
Nurturing ourselves			2	4	15	

### (ii) Parents' confidence in using the Programme

The parents were then asked how confident they were in using the same aspects of the programme. The results of this are summarised below. There was a tendency for most parents to be confident in using 'praise' (15 parents were very confident) whereas they tended to be least confident in using 'Time Out' (only 3 parents were very confident).

Table 8

<b>Parents' confidence in using the Programme</b> (on a scale of 1-5 where 1= not confident and 5= very confident)						
<b>SCALE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>No Reply</b>
Praise			2	7	12	
Boundaries & family rules		2	3	10	6	
Rewards/penalties		1	3	9	7	1
Choices & Consequences		1	5	7	8	
Time Out	2	1	9	5	3	1
Honouring feelings			1	10	9	1
Listening/talking				11	9	
Problem solving			6	10	3	2
Ignoring behaviour		3	8	2	6	2
Nurturing ourselves	1	5	6	5	4	

### **Recommending the Nurturing Programme to other parents**

Parents from all groups were very enthusiastic about the programme and said they would definitely recommend it to other parents. One parent said:

*'Yes, yes, yes, it should be compulsory in ante-natal classes.'*

While another, from a different group, commented:

*'It 'helps you to maintain confidence – try new things. Gives you the tools for greater understanding.'*

Several parents remarked that they had been introduced to useful techniques and advice:

*'Because there are many techniques that would be useful to many parents'.*

They particularly valued the support given by other parents and the opportunity to exchange ideas in a supportive atmosphere.

The group activities appear to have established a bond amongst the group members, and a sense of enjoyment of the activities, although some parents were initially deterred by the prospect of having to speak in front of others, while others complained that some parents were *'hogging the time'*.

### **The immediate impact of the Nurturing Programme on parents and their families**

Parents reported many positive outcomes as a result of taking part in the Nurturing Programme:

- ◆ Feeling more committed to their families.
- ◆ Improvements in the frequency and quality of family contact.

- ◆ Improved confidence and communication skills.
- ◆ Understanding the needs and perspective of others.
- ◆ More positive attitudes towards their children.

## PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES & EXPERIENCES OF THE 10 - WEEK NURTURING PROGRAMME

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall participating parents were enthusiastic about the programme.

**The Weekly Evaluation Forms** illustrate how the parents were attentive and willing to accept the ethos of the Nurturing Programme.

**The Family Logs** show that the families had been trying behaviour techniques to help them manage or bond with their children. However on a less positive note, while most the parents were fully committed to the Nurturing Programme techniques, implementing them was a challenge for many. Some parents had reservations about certain techniques in the Programme (Time Out), usually because they found it difficult to implement.

**The End of Programme Evaluation Forms** show that there was good peer support and interaction. Few reported any dramatic changes in their children's behaviour but there was a general perception that family life was easier and there had been improvements in parent/child communication.

## SECTION 4:

### WHAT TEACHERS & HEAD TEACHERS SAID ABOUT IMPLEMENTING THE NURTURING PROGRAMME IN SCHOOL

Once the teaching staff had completed their training, both they and the headteachers of their respective schools were asked to review the implementation of the Nurturing Programme in the classroom and school.

Class teachers completed the Family Links Review Questionnaire but from a methodological point of view it was not possible to analyse them fully, mainly because at some point the Questionnaire had been redesigned and so some of the questions had changed. Furthermore, the sample was drawn from class teachers from different year groups in ten different primary and infant schools and this made comparison difficult. That said; it has been possible to draw some broad conclusions about implementation from some of the questionnaire responses.

In addition to these, the results of an analysis of semi structured interviews are presented below. These interviews were conducted during June and July 2004 with four headteachers from primary schools in Oxfordshire. The aim was to explore the implementation of the Nurturing Programme in their respective schools.

#### **THE REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES**

*(Class teachers' responses to some of the questions)*

##### **The Nurturing Programme as a support for teachers**

All felt that the Nurturing Programme supported the teachers in their role by providing a consistent approach and a vocabulary that could be shared by all the children in the school. It was perceived to be particularly important as a strategy for dealing with behavioural issues. One newly qualified teacher pointed out that the very detailed lessons with a choice of activities provided excellent support for NQTs such as herself.

##### **Weekly class time given to the Nurturing Programme**

All teaching staff said that they gave class time to the Nurturing Programme but the vast majority interpreted this as time set aside for Circle Time. The times varied from 25 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes. In some instances this time was divided into several sessions on different days of the week. One might have thought that younger children would be given less Circle Time as they have a shorter concentration span whereas teachers of older children might be under pressure to meet the National Curriculum targets and so devote less time to it. However this did not seem to be the case. Only 4-5 teachers pointed out that 'the programme is applied consistently through out the day

##### **Most teachers felt that the Nurturing Programme had helped to improve the behaviour of children in the class.**

They commented class time discussions about feelings and appropriate behaviour had helped the majority of children to be more thoughtful and aware of the impact of their behaviour on others. Choices and Consequences were regarded as particularly effective in this although one person remarked that

*'At times their responses are becoming too pat or complacent and are made to please and not always out of a commitment to the idea.'*

### **Using the Programme language and strategies in class throughout the week and in school.**

Teachers sometimes found it hard to remember to use the strategies, language and techniques although many found them invaluable because they said they did not have to think about what language to use with the children.

### **Collaborate reward systems.**

All the teaching staff had reward systems in place. Some of these were individual rewards but most focused on team or class effort. Types of reward systems included marbles in a jar, leaves on a tree and colour charts, all leading to rewards like extra playtime or sport.

### **Strategies for measuring and adjust the emotional temperature of the class**

A high number of teachers failed to answer this question. This is not surprising as measurement is problematic. Most emotional temperature measurements were observational and focused on behaviour. Typical examples included changes in body language, facial expressions, or level and number of physical and verbal outbursts.

Strategies for adjusting the emotional temperature included Time Out, ignoring and changing the pace and type of activity.

### **Noticing whether the children were becoming more able to manage their feelings in a positive way**

Responses to this question were variable. Some teachers said that they had not noticed any changes, although it was often attributed it to the fact that they had only recently introduced the Nurturing Programme into their school. Those who were more positive said that children were able to use the Programme language to express themselves eg describing themselves as feeling 'warm and soft' and 'cold and prickly'.

Interestingly a number of teachers from several different schools pointed out that girls were more likely to use the Programme vocabulary than boys.

*'I have noticed a large number of the girls use the Programmes language to express their feelings.'*

Finally, very few teachers had introduced any ideas of their own to the Nurturing Programme although some said they had changed the order that they were introduced in response to the needs of the class at a particular time. One teacher stated that:

*'It was sometimes necessary to replace verbal aspects by enacted demonstrations owing to learning difficulties. eg a discussion about rules was replaced by a game which enacted principles of turn taking and sharing.'*

A number of the teachers were quite cautious in attributing behavioural changes to the influence of the Nurturing Programme and the following comment was one of several similar ones:

*I'm not sure the changes are always attributable to the Nurturing Programme. Many are complex issues and most attributable to different rates of maturity.'*

## SUMMARY

### Teachers' Review Questionnaire

- ◆ The Nurturing Programme is perceived as a providing support to teachers in their role.
- ◆ Most teachers operate a weekly Circle Time.
- ◆ Remembering to use the programme language and techniques was difficult for some teachers.
- ◆ Class behaviour had improved through use of strategies like Choices and Consequences.
- ◆ All teachers used collaborative reward systems in the Classroom.
- ◆ Teachers used observational and intuitive methods for assessing emotional temperature.
- ◆ Teachers used Nurturing Programme techniques to adjust the emotional temperature.
- ◆ Where teachers noticed children managing their feelings in a positive way they could not always attribute it to the Nurturing programme techniques.

## IMPLEMENTATION: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH FOUR HEADTEACHERS

This part focuses on in - depth interviews with four headteachers of primary schools in the Oxford area that were using the Nurturing Programme.

The headteachers were impressed with the way that the Nurturing Programme provided a school with a common language and a common approach to dealing with children with behaviour problems, for example:

*'Children know exactly where they stand but also know that there are going to be rewards and praise. Other schools have rewards, praise and sanctions but the language is the key, the choices and consequences and the "I" statements make schools with the Nurturing Programme different from other schools.*

What was striking about the schools was that that evidence of the Nurturing Programme was on display in all the public areas. Examples included posters and drawings about 'warm fuzzies' and reward charts and stickers for classes that had achieved particular goals. There was only an opportunity to visit one school staff room but here efforts in

creating a nurturing environment were clearly displayed; for example, teachers were awarded a pictorial slice of cake by their peers in recognition of a kindness, a job well done or to symbolise a comforting hug at a difficult time.

### **Embedding the Nurturing Programme in school**

In common with most headteachers, the four interviewed believed that the responsibility for pupils' emotional and behavioural development must be shared by the whole school. They viewed it important that everyone – Governors, teaching and support staff, children and parents - understood the principles and practices of the Nurturing Programme.

*'The Programme needs to be embedded in the school with a whole school commitment.'*

Another said her job was:

*'Ensuring everyone at senior management level lives and breathes it; sets an example by promoting it, modelling it, noticing it' and then it will cascade down to teachers, teaching assistants and children.'*

The headteacher in the fourth school admitted that it had been a struggle to establish the programme, mainly because the school had been through some troubled times which included changes in headteachers and a turnover in staff. This had led to some staff cynicism and reluctance to accept the Nurturing Programme ethos and techniques. Some had profound objections to the principle of Choices and Consequences as this went against their ideas of obedience. However the headteacher said that she was deeply committed to making the Programme work but that trying to change a culture was a slow process. It was important to maintain a high profile by committing her time, staff time and staff meeting time.

In contrast, the other three headteachers felt that it was well embedded in their schools:

*'It has become part of the way in which the adults in the school, work, which means it's become more of a fundamental part of the way children engage with each other.'*

Nevertheless there were general comments about the attitudes of some teachers, in particular it was felt that some older members of staff were resistant to change. It was also perceived that these people lacked motivation and had found it difficult to make time for the Nurturing Programme. Nevertheless while there were reports of different levels of commitment to the Nurturing Programme, it was agreed that the two - day training course enabled a closeness as people relaxed and were able to express themselves freely.

### **The nurturing ethos in a multi-cultural environment**

Although some of the interviewed headteachers represented Christian faith - based schools, they were all very anxious to point out that they operated in a multi-cultural environment in terms of the pupils and area.

*'While we are a Christian school, we operate in a multicultural environment. We celebrate differences, which ties in very well with what the Nurturing Programme is all about – valuing yourself, and being proud of what you are and what you can bring. And we see the diversity brings great richness.'*

## **Workplace stress and staying emotionally healthy**

Headteachers were asked what teachers found difficult in implementing the Nurturing Programme. One head responded by commenting that although it was difficult to speak for the teachers, she knew that they sometimes found it difficult to commit time to it when there was so much pressure to cover core curriculum subjects such as history, science and English. This headteacher was aware that:

*‘Stress affects the ability to interact in an empathic way and has a knock on effect on children. Teachers needed to be emotional healthy so that they can act calmly and model empathic behaviour.’*

This remark echoes Weare and Gray (2003, p.7) who point out that:

*‘There is good evidence that teachers cannot transmit emotional and social competence and wellbeing effectively if their own emotional and social needs are not met’.*

Generating and maintaining the nurturing culture within the school includes attending to the emotional, personal and professional needs and relationships of the staff and the headteachers were conscious that they should establishing opportunities to recognise staff effort.

They had introduced a range of nurturing activities, including relaxation days away from school.

*‘We’re a nurturing staff. We look after and support each other, for example last year we had a day of relaxation away from the school.’*

However, one headteacher highlighted what is possibly a common problem – although she found it easy to nurture children through positive praise, she admitted to finding it much more difficult to give overt recognition to staff for a job which they were paid to do, even though she fully supported the principle. However she saw this as a personal failing which she was trying to overcome.

Another head said she recognised that some teachers also find it difficult to give praise:

*‘Some teachers aren’t very comfortable with talking through praise and criticism but I feel with all people, with the pressures on our lives, it’s very therapeutic, the training, for yourself-because you look at things about yourself. It’s really helped me in my relationships, not only with the children but with other people, in the school. Because every one has their stuff, don’t they?’*

## **Training resources and teaching materials**

The programme works in a repetitive way so that topics are visited each term and

*‘Are multi-layered so that the children’s emotional literacy is built up and so they can develop conversation and depth of discussion you can have with children.’*

All schools use a set of handbooks developed by Family Links. These books are expected to meet the needs of teachers delivering the Programme and the headteachers viewed them as a very valuable resource although they reported that some teachers found the material rather too repetitive.

*'Some teachers have tired of it and said that they've exhausted the material in Book Two and intend to go onto Book Three.'*

This is where teachers need more support in exploring ways of delivering the Nurturing Programme. Headteachers who are committed to the Programme and have a thorough knowledge of the teaching material are able to say, as this one did:

*'I've said that you don't just go on to the next book, you should be delving deeper into the framework given you in Books One, Two and Three.'*

Another recognised the difficulties of managing a large class and said:

*'If you have a large class of 30 or more the management during circle time can be difficult. My solution is to have shorter sessions and if you have a restless group, focus on the co-operative games and a bit of discussion. Keep it short and build up gradually.'*

All four headteachers remarked that classroom management was one of the key challenges for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in city schools and it was generally agreed that NQTs particularly valued the structured Circle Time material as it meant one less lesson to prepare.

*'They like the structure of the programme as they don't have to do any extra lesson planning.'*

### **Measuring the effect of the nurturing programme**

While the headteachers were very confident of the benefits of the Nurturing Programme, they understandably found it very difficult to measure its effect because a child's development and behaviour are influenced by so many other variables and because the Programme does not relate easily to National Curriculum assessments. While they could not point to any hard evidence that it worked they used a variety of 'soft' indicators such as:

1. At transfer to secondary school some headteachers received positive reports from the receiving school about the behaviour of the transferring children.
2. Good Ofsted reports and comments in relation to the section: 'Behaviour and Attitudes to Learning'.
3. Observation of changes in attitude and behaviour in children new to the school.
4. Observation of the children in general and their relationships with other children and staff members.

*'They are confident and articulate and able to negotiate their own problems a lot of the time and have been empowered by the Nurturing Programme.'*

5. Entries in a 'Behaviour Book' at school recording good and bad behaviour.

### **Cost of the Nurturing Programme**

The training provided by Family Links includes:

1. A two day training course
2. Post training refresher days in school
3. Post training observation of Circle Time led by staff
4. Post training Demonstration lessons by Family Links
5. Post training attendance at staff review meetings

## 6. Responses to Individual and adhoc requests for support and advice from headteachers or teaching staff.

Schools cannot introduce the Nurturing Programme without fully trained staff. This was recognised by all:

*'Training is crucial; you can't start the Nurturing Programme without it.'*

However headteachers had different attitudes towards training costs, which were taken out of the Inset Budget. One or two seemed barely aware of the charges made by Family Links training and support, in contrast to one headteacher who was very financially conscious:

*'Schools really do have to think about where they spend the money.'*

Nevertheless all said that the Programme was so worthwhile that the cost was extremely good value for money

*'I think the training is high quality.'*

One of the strengths of the training programme and support was that Family Links would make every effort to tailor it to the needs of school concerned. This included anything from addressing particularly challenging behavioural issues to delivering training programme or attending meetings during the evening or at weekends.

Family Links post training attendance at staff meetings was singled out for recognition:

*'We always have a PHSE staff meeting every term and the Family links trainer has worked closely with us and comes in and offers support. This gives the teachers a chance to air their concerns and a chance to discuss things openly and come to a mutual agreement.'*

*Also there have been times when teachers have let circle time slip and not done it every week, this is where it's important to keep it a higher profile in staff meetings and we also raise the profile by giving a whole day's training to it as a refresher day- to raise it on the agenda.'*

### **Linking parents and schools in the nurturing environment**

The 10 week Nurturing Programme for parents is offered during the day in some schools and in the evening in other schools, depending on the requirements of the parents. It introduces parents to key vocabulary used with the children and strategies to use with the children and so links in with the Nurturing Programme in schools

In principle, the four headteachers were supportive of the linked programme for parents although some did not seem to be very familiar with the process. Some of their comments suggested that parents were not full partners in the development of the school's nurturing environment.

### **Recruiting parents onto the Nurturing Programme**

A variety of formal and informal means were used to recruit parents onto the Programme. These included

- ◆ Word of mouth

- ◆ School news letters
- ◆ Recommendation between parents

While the Nurturing Programme is open to all parents, some headteachers nominated parents who they felt could benefit because of their particular family circumstances. However, according to one head, this could backfire:

*'Maybe in the past I have recommended parents to join the course and they may have been wary, thinking it was a criticism.'*

She said that perhaps this led to an erratic attendance, but that:

*'There's nothing that Family Links can do. The school must make clear to the parents that they are expected to come for ten weeks.'*

- ◆ Strategies for overcoming parents' reluctance to join

(i) Parents fears about demands on their literacy skills

One headteacher remarked that some parents were hesitant to join because they may have had difficulties at school and not learnt basic reading and writing skills. She based this on her knowledge of a particular parent

*'It was the actual quantity of reading required and the parent felt she couldn't cope with it.'*

She went on to say that this made it difficult even though the trainer was very sensitive to the problem and would make sure that the parent was not chosen to do any writing.

- ◆ Articulacy and confidence

Another headteacher made the interesting observation that

*'Parents need to be quite articulate because they have to be able to express their feelings. Coupled with this, they have to be confident because they will be disclosing their thoughts and feelings and parenting behaviours to a group of peers.'*

Family Links may disagree with this, on the grounds that the point of the Nurturing Programme is to empower people and give them the confidence open up about the experiences.

### **Main challenges in introducing the Nurturing Programme in school**

- Conflicts between staff over Family Links ideas of Choices and Consequences
- Time and commitment. What emerged from this analysis is that the establishment of the Nurturing Programme takes time and needs the commitment of the headteacher to make it work.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Headteachers interviews about implementation**

- ◆ Commitment of the headteacher is vital
- ◆ Varying levels of commitment from teaching staff
- ◆ Very good value for money
- ◆ Works well in a multi-cultural environment
- ◆ Takes time to become embedded in the school

## 7. MAIN CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

### MAIN CHALLENGES

Physical conditions meant that some teaching staff found their concentration wandering during the training course. As much of the course models Circle Time activities it is important to make the link between comfort levels of adult and child and consider the effect on behaviour.

Time Out is considered the most difficult technique. Family Links needs to consider how schools and parents can best be supported in its use.

### MAIN SUCCESSES

The Nurturing Programme two day training course for teaching staff

- ◆ Gave teachers an opportunity to reflect and learn in a supportive environment.
- ◆ Gave teachers various classroom strategies and techniques to use to encourage children's positive social, emotional and behavioural development.
- ◆ Modelled classroom activities and behaviours and so enabled teachers to empathise better with their pupils.
- ◆ Was particularly helpful to newly qualified teachers as it provided them with some ready made tools and lesson plans.

The ten day Nurturing Programme for parents

- ◆ Provided a common language at home and school.
- ◆ Enabled parents to recognise how their own past experiences and current behaviours can affect their parenting.
- ◆ Gave parents the techniques to make positive changes in their parenting.

## 8. SOME COMMENTS ON THIS EVALUATION

The present study is based on a small-scale qualitative study and therefore there are potential limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn. In addition, the sampling system and quality and construction of the questionnaires somewhat compromise the reliability of the findings.

Family Links must celebrate the fact that it has constructed evaluation tools and administered them so diligently over the years. Many organisation fail to do this and it marks out Family Links as an agency that wants to serve its clients well.

However for the future the organisation should consider the following

- (i) How does it want to monitor and audit the delivery of training and support?
- (ii) How does it want to evaluate the delivery of training and support?
- (iii) Why does it want to either?
- (iv) What information does it want from the evaluation and audit?
- (v) What are the most appropriate methods to use to obtain the information wanted?

## COMMENTS ON SOME OF THE COMPLETED EVALUATION FORMS SUPPLIED BY FAMILY LINKS FOR THIS EVALUATION

### (i) The Teachers End of Course Evaluation Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a useful feedback tool for Family Links but needs to be designed to record more focused participant experiences of the training course.

Some of the questions need rewording and it may also be helpful to record participant gender and ethnicity.

### (ii) The Family Log

This is a very useful reflective tool for parents but not very useful as an evaluation instrument as it is difficult to assess change and because it is difficult to tell how much the change is associated with changes in the parent's approach or in the school's approach.

### (ii) The Teachers' Review Questionnaire

The first part of this questionnaire asks for qualitative information which can take time to analyse but it asks some interesting questions about implementation of the Nurturing Programme. The second part comprises a grid for teachers to complete, ostensibly to identify whole class behaviour - change. This is a very crude measure and most teachers found it very difficult to complete. It was not used in this evaluation report as it could not provide any meaningful data.

### (iii) The Headteachers Overview Questionnaire

This questionnaire asked for qualitative comments and was not used in this report as it was very time consuming to analyse and it is doubtful that the data would have added anything new to the Findings.

### (iv) The Trainers Pre-Training Questionnaire and Support Session Report

Neither of these were analysed for this report because the information provided would not have added anything to the report findings and conclusion. However they are a very useful reflective tool for the trainer to keep focused on the training programme and they also provide a very useful diary record of the training and support process.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

(i) Consider carrying out research into 'Time Out' to find out how it can be used more effectively.

(iii) The Family Log was not an effective evaluation method. Consider other ways of evaluating progress in implementing the Nurturing Programme at home, perhaps by using a family log and teachers log to tracking a child's progress at home and school.

(iv) Decide on a comprehensive evaluation strategy with a realistic budget. One approach would be to use an independent evaluator to do it all. Another approach would be to employ an independent evaluator to collaborate in an evaluation design and method, including a simple data collection instrument. Family Links could then carry out an evaluation at suitable intervals.

## CONCLUSION

Overall the findings (as far as they went) show that the Family Links Nurturing programme can be judged a success in terms of both the training and implementation.

However the evaluation is based on retrospective perceptions and anecdotal evidence and so can only partly explain and confirm the success of the Programme. Nevertheless it is part of a jigsaw of studies which focus on nurturing programmes and particularly on the holistic, linked approach adopted by Family Links.

On a broader education policy level the issues raised highlight important questions about the training of teachers and other staff in the creating a nurturing environment and how parents can become involved in the process. It also raises questions about how teachers are able to balance notions of academic achievement which is measurable and of behaviour management, which is more difficult to do.

It is hoped that this evaluation will inform a much larger study about training teachers in the implementation of a nurturing environment in school as part of a home-school linked programme such as that delivered by Family Links.

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