

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This evaluation was conducted as part of a Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Practitioner-Led Research project (2007-08).

Funding for the initial project was provided by the Children's Fund. The project has also received support from many local organisations including the Adult Community Learning Unit, Andover Family Learning Project, Extended Schools, Hampshire Children's Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Test Valley Community Services.

Our thanks are extended to all the schools that participated in the Nurturing Programme and helped us achieve a better understanding of how this programme might be applied to support children more effectively:

Andover Church of England Primary School
Anton Infant School
Balksbury infant School
Balksbury Junior School
Knights Enham Infant School
Knights Enham Junior School
Maple Ridge School
Norman Gate School
Portway Infant School
Portway Junior School
Shepherds Spring Junior School
St John The Baptist Catholic Primary School
Vigo Junior School

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Disclaimer:

Any opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of either Hampshire's Children's Services Department or that of the Educational Psychology Service.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Children Act (DfES, 2004a) and the Every Child Matters: change for children agenda (DfES, 2004b) indicate that supporting families is a central tenet of current government policy. There is also an emphasis on preventative forms of support aimed at families with young children. It is widely acknowledged that professionals can enable parents to find better ways of dealing with behavioural challenges and help them recognise the importance of their parenting role (DfES, 2003).

2 THE NURTURING PROGRAMME

The Nurturing Programme was initially developed and evaluated at the Kempe Institute for Child Abuse and Neglect in Denver (Bavolek, 1990). The programme is founded on the premise that parenting is a learned skill and is designed to promote emotional literacy, nurturing and relationship skills in both adults and children. The approach is founded on four basic principles:

- **Self-awareness and self-esteem.** Achieving self-awareness relies on knowing and understanding oneself. Bavolek claims that our self-esteem increases when we take the time to nurture our self. This in turn provides people with the capacity to nurture others, particularly children.
- **Appropriate expectations.** There is a need to recognise that children develop at different rates: physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. Parents need to match their expectations to the child's actual ability. Where expectations are unrealistic there can be a range of negative outcomes: defiance, irritation or despondency. By establishing appropriate expectations parents can become better attuned to their child's development and hence are more able to reinforce incremental improvements.
- **Positive discipline.** The programme acknowledges that children need to be taught to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable behaviour. Parents learn the importance of setting boundaries and issuing fair penalties for inappropriate behaviour. However, the main emphasis is on positive discipline, which enables parents to replace negative disciplinary approaches with praise, rewards, choice, negotiation and responsibility.
- **Empathy.** The programme stresses that developing sensitivity to the feelings of others is central to improved relationships. Bavolek argues that an empathic response to others can foster closer and more trusting

The programme constitutes two interrelated parts; a school-based programme, which provides training to children¹, and a parenting programme (Family Links, 2007). Whilst the typical frequency and length of sessions is discussed below, these can be modified to meet the needs of the audience. The programme addresses the following issues:

- Promoting emotional literacy
- Raising self-esteem
- Developing communication and social skills
- Teaching positive ways to resolve conflict
- Providing effective strategies to encourage co-operative, responsible behaviour and manage challenging behaviour in children
- Offering insights into the impact of feelings on behaviour
- Encouraging adults to take time to look after themselves

The school-based programme, which targets schools and early-years settings, offers personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) that reflects the Curriculum 2000 guidelines. The programme is provided during one-hour weekly lessons every term throughout Key Stage 1, and during 45-minute sessions each week throughout Key Stage 2. The programme essentially constitutes a spiral curriculum in which topics are revisited on a termly basis. Materials for these sessions are supplied in three age-related handbooks: Foundation Stage, for children aged 3 to 5 years. Book 2 for Years 1 to 4 and Book 3 for Years 5 to 9 (in addition, a transition programme for Year 6 and 7 is currently under development). The programme seeks to:

- Foster greater understanding of children's feelings and provide insight into their behaviour
- Provide a model that enhances consistency and teamwork amongst staff
- Supply an emotional health programme for all children
- Give staff effective strategies for encouraging responsible behaviour and for managing behavioural challenges.

¹ The term children has been adopted for convenience and will be used throughout this report to refer to both children and young people

The parenting programme² is delivered in two-hourly sessions over the course of ten weeks. Sessions are led by two group leaders and tend to work best for groups of up to 10 parents/carers. The programme is appropriate for families from all social backgrounds, whatever their level of need, and is relevant both to parents who are already confident in their role and as a more focused intervention for those experiencing difficulties. It builds on parents' skills and introduces ways of improving family relationships and skills to help manage child behaviour. Sessions cover the following content:

1. Introducing the programme, the four constructs and giving praise
2. The question of discipline and time out...to calm down
3. Family rules, rewards and penalties
4. Personal power, self-esteem, choices and consequences
5. Feelings...and what we do with them. Communicating clearly: using 'I' statements
6. Kinds of touch and nurturing ourselves
7. Ages and stages in child development, and helping children grow up
8. Issues around sex and helping children stay safe
9. Behaviour to ignore, problem-solving and negotiating
10. Continuing the family journey

The Family Nurturing Network, an Oxford based charity, initially piloted the Nurturing Programme in the UK. Programmes at this point tended to target high-risk families. Family Links developed from this and became a registered charity in 1997. Family links has an exclusive licence to develop the Nurturing Programme in the UK (Hunt, 2003).

The Nurturing Programme has been widely used in schools in the UK and was listed in the DfES (2004c) report *What Works in Parenting Support?* It has also been used in women's prisons (Nicholls, 2006) where voluntary attendance levels were reported to have been consistently high, in Local Authority Children's Homes (Bell, et al., 2003), on teacher training courses (Wear & Stratford, 2004) and as part of the Sure Start Programme (Osgood & James, 2006).

Uncharacteristically, the Nurturing Programme has been subject to a number of independent evaluations with many

² The term 'parenting programme' has been used as we are referring to a parent support programme which uses a defined curriculum, works with parents in groups, and is aimed at improving parenting practices and family functioning.

reports being published in refereed journals. However, many of these studies were qualitative in design and it is recognised (DfES, 2004c) that further quantitative investigation is necessary before outcomes for children and families can be properly determined. The difficulty of establishing such evidence is alluded to in many of the studies reviewed below.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW.

3.1 The parenting programme

As part of a larger evaluation of the Nurturing Programme, operating in Oxfordshire, Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) interviewed parents 9 -10 months after the programme had finished. The overall consensus was that it had been a worthwhile experience, which had brought about beneficial changes in their lives. Osgood & James (2006) similarly explored the parental views of the programme, as part of Sure Start and Family Support arrangements in North West Kensington and Golborne. The principal benefits were consistent with those found by Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) and included the following:

- **Parents felt supported by their peers.** Parents mentioned that they had previously felt very 'isolated' in their parenting role. Many mentioned the strong bonds that formed between parents during the course (many still continuing to meet). Parents had been reassured by coming to realise that other parents had similar problems. Parents were also perceived as less judgemental than the professionals with whom they had come into contact. A reduction in feelings of guilt was cited, linked to recognition that things, which had gone wrong, were not always the parent's fault.
- **Parents felt they had regained control over their parental role.** Parents felt they had the ability to change some of the behavioural issues they faced. This appeared to be associated with an increased capacity to stop and think (whilst remaining calm) about things, such as the reasons behaviours had occurred. Many also made reference to acquiring new techniques to help them address problems. This appeared to have played an important role in the cessation of less helpful practices such as shouting, smacking and threatening.
- **Increased empathy.** Parents appeared to have increased in their capacity to empathise with their children and this was associated with improvements in their ability to recognise and understand the reasons why children behave in particular ways. This had resulted in an understanding that children have the

- **Improved sense of self.** Many indicated that the programme had helped re-establish their sense of self-worth and the importance of nurturing themselves. The programme embodied a non-judgemental approach and parents did not feel that they were being taught how to parent, but rather, were being supported to parent. Their practices were not criticised, and course leaders were not prescriptive about what they should do.
- **Longevity of the lessons learnt.** Despite the shortness of the programme, much of what they had been taught had been internalised (sufficiently for it still to be apparent 9-months after the end of the programme, in the case of Barlow and Stewart-Brown, 2001). The content was further strengthened by parent's ability to refer to the associated handbook *The Parenting Puzzle* (Hunt, 2003).

Parents highlighted a range of ways in which they felt the programme had brought about improvements in themselves, their children, and the family dynamics, including feeling closer to their partners. As regards children, parents cited less demanding behaviour and increased recognition of their children's feelings. Many felt that the programme had helped them 'find a way forward', through the opportunity to reflect on the difficulties they had experienced during childhood, and their experience of having been parented (from which much of the expertise derived). Similar positive perceptions by parents are reported by DfES (2004d) in response to parenting programmes accessed as a result of parenting orders linked to behaviour and attendance problems at school.

Eaude (2006) found parents reported finding the sessions emotionally difficult, even painful at times, but nevertheless they had gained from the experience and relationships at home had improved. Some spoke movingly of how it had changed their parenting and impacted on their own emotional well-being. The DfES (2003) report indicated that Headteachers perceived that they were able to engage previously hard to reach parents in the programme and reported observing parents recruiting others to the thinking and approach it promoted. Further endorsement for the approach was manifest in the willingness of some Headteachers to invest in the programme through the recruitment of home-school link workers (HSLWs). There is evidence that schools in the UK are increasingly employing HSLWs (Hallgarten, 2003), whose roles involve building relationships with families; working to improve attendance;

and supporting parental involvement in their children's learning. Hence they are well placed to sustain such initiatives. In contrast Eade (2006) found that all but a few schools had found parent groups difficult to sustain, and that success was often dependent on the commitment of a parent group leader. Taken together these findings suggest that schools need to be prepared to invest in the infrastructure necessary to support this initiative and HSLWs may have a key function in this respect.

Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) concluded that it seemed likely the outcomes were the result of a combination of affective strategies which helped parents to focus on feelings, relationships and their own experience of being parented, in addition to the provision of behavioural strategies aimed at providing them with new methods of managing children's emotional and behavioural development. In addition, Osgood and James (2006) felt that to enhance the effectiveness of the programme:

- Agencies need to be aware of the programme and feel confident to make appropriate referrals.
- Mechanisms need to be in place to channel parents with complex problems to more bespoke programmes.
- A commitment to the programme is vital. Ideally all family members should be engaged, although this may not prove feasible. Mothers tended to be the main focus of attention. Whilst fathers are notoriously hard-to-reach, the importance of communicating the value of the programme to family relationships was felt to be worthwhile.
- Some parents need support before embarking upon the programme. This was particularly the case where there were confidence issues or where English was not the principle language at home.
- Careful preparation at the outset might help to ensure a lower rate of drop out. Hence work needs to be done to communicate the aims, focus and intended outcomes.

3.2 School-based Programme.

Eade (2006) looked at the implementation and sustainability of the Nurturing Programme in schools. He also looked for evidence of impact by reviewing the school's performance indicators, information from Ofsted inspection reports and questionnaire measures.

The reason schools had become involved were typically because of concerns about behaviour, often linked to a need for consistency or a wish to make better provision for children's emotional needs. Following the training almost all

of the schools built circle time into their weekly timetable, and were using the language of the programme in the operation of the school. The concepts of “Choice and Consequences” were cited as the most successful aspects (found by both McNeill, 2005 and Eade, 2006). Time Out and ignoring were deemed by schools to be the least useful content (McNeill, 2005).

The impact was perceived to have been in building children’s self-esteem and fostering personal responsibility. The main beneficiaries were children who lacked secure boundaries, those whose immediate response was confrontational and those who were over-quiet. Schools tended to use the programme as a foundation for emotional literacy rather than as a PSHCE curriculum. Several schools had also supplemented the programme with other materials, most notably the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) materials (DfES, 2007). The quality of the training was rated highly and was regarded as *‘making a significant and positive impact on the school culture’* (p. 3). The mixture of practical activities and the underlying rationale was thought to be a strong feature. Staff welcomed the variety, the emphasis on positive ideas, the practicality and the enjoyment. Establishing a common language was thought to have been particularly helpful in enabling the school to *‘have a common way of discussing feelings and behaviour, and helping children to reflect on behaviour’* (p. 4). This was felt to have been the most significant to make an impact.

Eade (2006) concluded that the Nurturing Programme was judged to have had a positive effect on children’s emotional literacy and on school culture. There was a similar conclusion in the DfES (2003) report. Headteachers felt that the programme had played a significant part in improving the schools ethos and many were impressed enough to proselytes for it. McNeill (2005) also found that teachers perceived an enhancement of their skills, greater empathy with the children, and welcomed being given more tools to promote children’s social, emotional and behavioural development.

Weare and Stratford (2004) evaluated the impact of the programme on teacher training students. The extent to which students’ confidence to deal with children had changed was gauged via a questionnaire before and after the course. This measure also sought to determine whether reactions to situations would change, by inviting them to respond to scenarios and say what they might think/feel/say/do in response. Students appreciated the

focus on behaviour and felt their confidence in managing pupil behaviour had improved. They perceived themselves to have gained in emotional awareness and empathy. Echoing Eade's (2006) findings, 'Choices and Consequences' was the content most frequently cited as being useful. The scenarios indicated the largest improvements were evident in dealing with defiant children. Less improvement was evident in scenarios dealing with sad children.

In contrast to this upbeat feedback, Eade (2006) indicated that these positive views were not supported by evidence in the school's performance indicators, partly because of the lack of reliable evidence and partly because of the difficulty in isolating the specific contribution of the programme. Equally the DfES (2003) research failed to identify the impact of the programme, in this case on children's attainments. They acknowledged that whilst establishing some of the necessary conditions for learning, it could not be claimed that it had an impact on attainment.

The Anti-social Behaviour Act (2003) introduced new powers for Local Authorities to apply for parenting orders to address children's behaviour at school. These can compel parents to attend a parenting programme. DfES (2004d) found some evidence of improved behaviour and attendance as a result of parents attending such programmes (which included the Nurturing Programme). However this was primarily in cases where the child's problems were linked to home-based difficulties.

4 THE ANDOVER PROJECT

Andover is a small market town in Hampshire, which has grown rapidly since the 1960s. Whilst Hampshire is generally regarded to be an affluent shire county, the Indices of Multiple deprivation (IMD) data indicates Andover contains some of the most deprived wards in the country. One of these falls nationally within the 12th centile and has the second highest teenage conception rate in Hampshire. Half the conceptions in girls aged 15 – 17 years in the Test Valley relate to two wards.

In 2001 Maggie Fisher (health visitor) carried out a survey of Andover schools to identify concerns and compared this to a national survey. Children's behaviour was rated of greater concern than the National survey results. Interestingly emotional problems were perceived to be of less concern.

Table 1: A comparison of the concerns perceived by Andover schools and the national survey.

Issues causing concern	Andover (n= 336)	National (n= 6,588)
Child behaviour	29.1%	23.51%
Family Health	11.01%	16.7%
Emotional problems	5.36%	8.64%
Education and special needs	7.14%	7.65%

A review of the programmes available to address these needs identified the Family Links Nurturing Programme. It was felt that this programme had the capacity to provide a way to promote emotional health and literacy within schools and families. Funding was obtained from the Children’s Fund to run the programme within schools in Andover. A multi-agency steering group was consequently set up to manage this initiative. This group had representatives from Hampshire Educational Psychology Service, a local Headteacher, Social Services Team Manager, Head of Behaviour Intervention Service and Family Learning.

4.1 TRAINING

Family Links Nurturing Programme has a robust training model. Participants can be trained either to be part of a Cascade Training team or as a Parent Group Leader. The training for the Cascade Training Team consisted of:

- Five day initial training (two national trainers working with a small group)
- Two day observation of school training delivered by a member of the national training team
- Two day school training delivered by local cascade team observed by a member of the national training team
- One day cascade team meeting
- One further day delivered by national training team

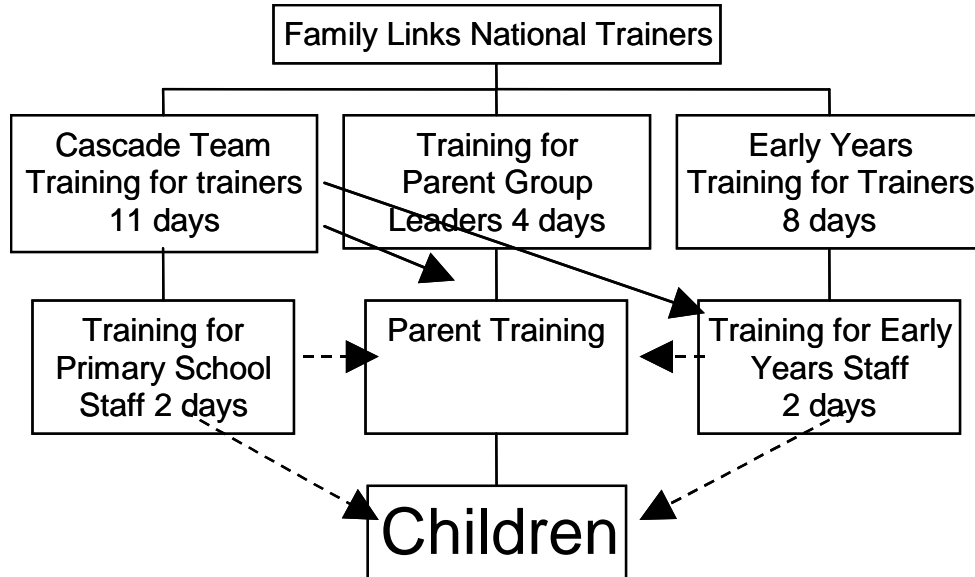
The cascade training team consisted of:

- Maggie Fisher, Health Visitor
- Claire Batham, School Nurse
- Sue Tarrant, Social Services
- Gill Graham, Learning Inclusion Worker
- Judith Lee, Educational Psychologist
- Kim White, School Nurse
- Laura Baker, Community Staff Nurse

Parent Group leaders were also sought from the community and other professionals working in the area.

The Parent Group Leaders received four days of training delivered by the national training team.

Figure 1: An illustration of the training model:



Family Links stress that the Nurturing Programme view must be about experiential learning; the cascade training and the two day training is essentially about encouraging staff to experience what is in the programme. There is also an emphasis on getting school staff to consider what is the difference between teaching and facilitating with the clear message that when running the programme facilitation skills are needed rather than direct teaching.

4.2 NEXT STEPS

The possibility of running the programme was broached with local primary schools and they were invited to an information session conducted by Annette Mountford, (Director of Family Links). Many of the members of the cascade training team also work within these schools and were able to promote the project with the schools and answer queries. The first two-day training sessions for primary school staff, delivered by National Trainers, took place in February 2004. Four-day trainings for Parent Group Leaders began in 2004-5.

Parents were invited to join parenting courses. These tended to be held at the school or in local community settings. The project has run parenting programmes both during the school day, sometimes supported by a crèche and in the evenings. It was hoped that parents would develop an interest in the programme through hearing their

children discussing some of the key messages (e.g. personal power, warm fuzzy feelings, cold prickly feelings). Community groups such as Kids Church and the Family Learning Project were also made aware of the courses and were able to direct interested parents to sessions.

To date the project has delivered the two-day training for primary school staff to 14 schools including two special schools. The number of Parent Group Leaders has increased and includes a number of parents who have completed the parenting course and subsequently wanted to train to deliver the programme. It is possible for parents to receive OCN accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 for completing the Parenting Programme. Over 40 parenting course have run both in Andover and in other parts of the county including a Children's Centre in Winchester. There have been few difficulties in encouraging the participation of parents but there are continuing problems with funding, both to run courses and to enable the four-day training for Parent Group Leaders to be offered.

The Area Coordinator and Family Links provide supervision for the Cascade Training Team and Parent Group Leaders.

4.3 ISSUES

Many schools viewed the project as a way to engaging parents in a programme to support their children. However despite their interest they frequently had competing priorities for their training day and found it hard to arrange the time.

Two special schools have been trained. This required the staff to consider how best to adapt the material, specifically for those children lacking verbal skills. Feedback from these schools however has not materially different from that provided by mainstream primary schools.

Professionals with a qualification for teaching adults were paid for delivering the training course for Parent Group Leaders. The pay was for two hours at community tutor rates. Parent group leaders without the qualification were paid for four hours (to include two hours planning and preparation) at community volunteer rates. In terms of personal development a number of parents who trained have gone on to find paid employment, although this has meant some have then been unable to continue delivering the parenting programme.

In order to sustain the programme termly staff support sessions are provided. This is valued but difficult to

manage given many schools have staff meetings on the same days. Top up refresher training has been offered and a further top up training will take place in March 2008.

Parenting programmes have been successful. Parents evaluate the programme during the ten weeks and give glowing reports of success. Word of mouth has been very powerful in encouraging parents to attend.

5 SCHOOL'S FEEDBACK ON THE TRAINING ³

The following represents feedback from 231 school staff who undertook the training. This included teachers, Learning Support Assistants and lunchtime staff.

5.1 NEW IDEAS GAINED

Staff were asked what new ideas they had gained from the training. Each respondent tended to identify a number of points; hence we identified 341 issues for day 1. The ten most common responses are listed in table 2.

TABLE 2: The ten most common ideas cited as being gained from the Day 1 training.

Issues	Frequency	
Choices - positive/negative	40	17%
Collaborative rewards	37	16%
Reminder of things I was aware of, but not using	33	14%
Circle time function and ideas	28	12%
Consequences	27	12%
Self-esteem issues & intervention	22	10%
Rewarding systems	18	8%
Being positive	13	6%
Brain-break	13	6%
Personal Power	12	5%

Despite the wording of the question, 14% of respondents indicated that they were already familiar with some of the content. However this did not imply that the training was of no value; they welcomed being reminded of points and it had prompted them to accommodate it in their future practice. One person plaintively voiced this as - *I don't do enough of what I know.*

However it was not merely an issue of reminding people of issues, the training also offered new ideas and techniques for applying approaches.

³ [Note: italics have been used to identify direct quotes.]

- *Not new ideas but it has reminded me of the things I know and brought the emotional side of learning back into focus. I am excited and look forward to putting the new scheme into practice.*
- *This has brought known ideas to the fore and was a good reminder to use them.*

As cited in the literature (McNeill, 2005 and EAUDE, 2006), the reframing of children's behaviour as them exercising choices over how they respond, and that choices had related consequences, was the concept a large number of people welcomed from the training. Inherent in this is the notion that behaviour lies within our ability to control, and hence we are accountable for our actions.

- *How to use 'choices and consequences' properly and to effect.*
- *Being clear on giving choices - negative/positive and the consequences.*

The material on the use of collaborative reward systems to support the behaviour of the whole class or school was also popular. Whilst some people were already familiar with the use of rewards to modify the behaviour of individual children they had not viewed this as an approach, which could be adopted for use with groups of children. Group reward systems also address some of the inequities of only reinforcing individuals whose behaviour may generally be unacceptable. Again, many indicated that they welcomed the richness of ideas about how this might be addressed.

- *Whole class to achieve collaboratively - not just individuals.*
- *Rewards – class rewards e.g. Super Soaker Pond, Sponge Ball Pond.*
- *Lovely ideas for collaborative praise/rewards.*

There was also some overlap with those who cited reward systems as an aspect they had welcomed from the training.

Staff were similarly asked what new ideas they had gained from the second day's training. Here we identified approximately 330 ideas. The ten most common responses are listed in table 3. These categories are not however mutually exclusive and there is some overlap between them. Most people indicated that the training had provided them with some insights into the behavioural challenges presented by children and the nature of underlying emotions. A better understanding of the mechanisms of anger was specifically mentioned.

- *Real insight into emotional behaviour and reason for behaviour.*
- *Good opportunity to reflect on handling anger.*
- *Understanding my own feelings and how to tackle them and then how to use new understanding with children.*

TABLE 3: The frequency with which respondents cited issues and the percentage recipients identifying each

Theme	Frequency	% mention
Manage behaviour more effectively	74	32
Lots of practical ideas, activities & games	65	28
Circle time	64	28
Dealing with emotions & feelings	28	12
Anger management	20	9
Use 'I' Statements	19	8
Communication with children	13	6
Reminder of aspects not using	13	6
Teaching ideas	10	4
Nurturing self and others (inc. staff support)	8	3

Comments also went beyond this to indicate that they had been given strategies to help them manage these feelings and behaviours more effectively. In relation to the management of behaviour the language of “*choice*” (again) and focusing on being positive were well represented, together with the more traditional behavioural concepts of rewards, consequences and ignoring. In tackling emotional aspects the use of “*feelings thermometers*” and emotional “*traffic lights*” featured significantly.

- *How to be more positive when dealing with children's bad behaviour and realising there could be a real reason and need.*
- *Will feel more confident in using the language of choice.*
- *Emotions linked to Red, Amber and Green.*
- *Ways in which to help my class manage their anger and how to achieve better behaviour, without negative comments.*

In looking at more proactive strategies participants felt they had been given practical ideas about the types of activities they could use with children to develop their emotional literacy. Linked to this were a number of comments indicating they had improved their understanding of how “circle time” might be used more effectively

- *Lots of ideas and activities we used in the sessions will be great to try out.*
- *Great games ideas – interesting circle time techniques.*

One of the other main themes related to how to communicate more effectively with children. Within this category, listening skills were most frequently identified. Comments about the importance of using ‘I’ statements were so prevalent that we recorded this as a category in its own right.

- *The ‘I’ statements excluding the ‘you’ ‘they’ was revealing in particular.*
- *How to listen more effectively so that everyone knows I am listening.*

5.2 HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE?

Responses to how participants felt about applying the content of the course were varied. The adjectives - *achievable, apprehensive, assured, daunted, energised, excited motivated, nervous, revitalised, unsure* – captures only a fraction of the range. To make some sense of these responses they were broadly classified into the three categories shown in table 4.

TABLE 4: Responses to the question about applying the content of Day 1 & 2

Day 1			Day2	
Category	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	157	72	124	79
Qualified	55	25	28	18
Negative	5	2	5	3
Total	217	100	157	100

The overwhelming response to both day 1 and 2 were that staff were extremely positive about putting the training into practice. Responses included those which suggested staff seemed confident, motivated and enthusiastic to make a start with what they had learned:

- *Feel confident about trying these ideas out. Look forward to see if they work with a particular child in my class.*
- *More confident in playing games and activities to help children talk about their feelings to each other or recognise and understand feelings in themselves.*

Within this category, 62 comments in day 1 and 35 comments in day 2 (29% and 21% of all the comments respectively) specifically indicated that they felt confident about applying these approaches. Our attempt to subdivide the day 2 comments further is shown below:

Confident - 35 responses
Keen to start - 28 responses
Enthusiastic - 14 responses

Discrimination at this level is however difficult to defend as people tended to use different words for semantically equivalent points. Within this category were the following:

- *Excited to get in the classroom and try them out.*
- *Confident as I think the children will really enjoy special time.*
- *Looking forward to working with class teacher to develop and practise what we have learned.*

A further 25% and 17% respectively indicated that they were willing to try these ideas, but were more qualified in their enthusiasm. Staff typically indicated that they felt they needed to do more preparatory work or have discussions with colleagues before introducing these approaches. Some also indicated that whilst they were willing to try the techniques they were apprehensive or nervous about it. Practical concerns were also raised about finding the time for this work, even where they were committed to the approach.

- *Will re-read in own time to help digest information and get greater understanding, then slowly introduce.*
- *Needs planning carefully but can be done.*
- *Will try one or two at a time – hope I do not forget others.*
- *Unless you try to put them into practice you won't know if you're capable or not.*

Lastly, only 2%-3% of responses indicated that they remained apprehensive about putting these ideas into practice. They typically felt that they would need further help and support before being able to do so.

- *Would like more practical advice on how to do this in the classroom.*
- *Hesitant – need to know more.*
- *Still anxious about being able to implement.*

- *A bit overwhelmed but I will try and implement the 'one to one' approaches.*

5.3 HOW USEFUL DID YOU FIND THE CONTENT

There are twenty-five main themes covered in the training, these are summarised in table 5. Participants were asked to rate how useful they found each of them using a four point Likert scale. The number of ratings varied slightly, and consequently the data has been presented as a percentage.

TABLE 5: Percentage of participants rating each of the themes covered.

	N =	Extremely	Useful	Not very	Pointless	Total
Ideas for work breaks, games	217	57	41	1	0	100
Using 'I' statements	210	56	41	3	0	100
Managing Anger	213	51	48	0	0	100
What we do with difficult feelings	216	46	54	0	0	100
Circle Time demonstration	213	44	50	6	0	100
Feelings	222	43	57	0	0	100
Self-Esteem	262	42	55	3	0	100
Time out...to calm down	213	41	54	5	0	100
Traffic lights/emotional temperature for learning	217	39	56	5	0	100
Collaborative Rewards	259	39	57	3	0	100
Choices & Consequences	250	38	58	5	0	100
Personal Power	259	37	54	9	0	100
Implementing the Programme	205	36	60	4	0	100
Behaviour to ignore	216	33	63	4	0	100
Time for Ourselves	254	32	59	7	2	100
Ideas for Work breaks, Games	252	31	61	8	0	100
Revisiting Praise	250	30	65	4	1	100
Boundaries	261	29	68	3	0	100
Feeling Faces	212	28	68	3	0	100
Thinking about facilitation skills	211	27	72	2	0	100
Learning Styles	208	25	72	2	0	100
Do's and Don'ts	259	21	70	8	0	100
The Learning Environment	255	18	79	3	0	100
Thinking about Facilitation Skills	224	16	77	7	0	100
The Four Constructs	261	16	78	5	0	100

On average 35% of respondents judged the content to be “extremely useful” and 61% rated the content as “useful”. Ratings “of pointless” were rare and were only given in relation to the content on “Praise” and “Time for ourselves”. Ideas for *work breaks and games*; the content on *Using ‘I’ statements* and *Managing Anger* were generally perceived to have been the most useful sections. From day 1 the work covered on “self-esteem” was rated most highly, closely followed by that on “collaborative rewards” and “choices & consequences”.

5.4 COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

The final question was a catchall item offering an opportunity for suggestions. This captured a wide range of comments with little uniformity in what was identified. Not everyone offered a response. For the purposes of analysis these were crudely categorised as general compliments about the course, specific compliments (in which people identified a specific aspect they liked), negative comments and improvement suggestions. A count of these categories is documented in table 6.

TABLE 6: Category of comments made by participants

Category	Day 1		Day2	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
General compliments	56	46	85	69
Specific compliments	34	28	29	24
Improvement	21	17	6	5
Negative	11	9	3	2
Totals	122	100	123	100

Just under half (46%) of the comments about Day 1 represented unsolicited compliments. These could broadly be rolled together as thank you for an interesting, fun and thought provoking day.

- *A super day I felt very relaxed in everyone's company.*
- *Excellent day - full of useful ideas.*
- *Looking forward to the second day*

The converse of this was the 9% of negative comments. The main issues here were that some staff were already familiar with some of the content, a few also found sitting for so long difficult. Whilst these were classified as negative they were often softened in the way they were expressed.

- *I feel as a teacher we already know a lot of the areas covered and put them into practice but it was nice to spend quality time with colleagues.*
- *Sitting still for a long time!*
- *Sometimes a little tedious writing ideas on flip charts. Very time consuming.*

A larger proportion of staff (17%) offered improvement suggestions, although others were implicit in some of the comments deemed negative (e.g. writing on flip charts). There was little commonality in the comments made; almost all of them represented the unique view of an individual participant. By way of illustration the following have been selected:

- *Perhaps clearer introduction to session.*
- *Some tasks felt confusing i.e. I often felt unsure about what we were meant to be doing - whether we were directing ideas towards children or ourselves.*
- *Could we do a little less writing in groups and spend more time talking through issues.*

It needs to be acknowledged that most comments (75%) were positive about day 1. In addition to the compliments, discussed earlier, a further 28% of comments identified specific aspects of the training that they had found valuable. These were clusters of comments around the theme of the need to be reminded of key messages and the opportunity the training provided to reflect on issues.

- *I feel that the school as a whole needed reminding of this to support each other and us.*
- *Time to reflect and see what I can change in my practice and that of others.*
- *Handbook looks helpful and practical.*
- *It has been a good day, you worked really hard and gave us an excellent opportunity to work together and reflect on the issues.*

A similar analysis was conducted on the feedback from day 2. Here the vast majority of the comments (69%) were classified as unsolicited compliments.

- *It has been a very valuable two days, lots of sound input, fun and laughter!*
- *Thank you for the last two days. It has given me a new injection of energy.*
- *Not only can I see the benefits of implementing this programme in school but I will also try to apply some aspects at home with three teenage children.*

Only 2% of comments might be described as negative. That some people were already familiar with the content was again voiced. The issues are documented below:

- *I did enjoy it but felt at times that we could have read the ideas from the book. The answers to the games were also able to be read beforehand.*
- *Hard to hear sometimes and hard to sit for such a long time.*

Just under a quarter of comments (24%) offered positive feedback about specific issues. These were often unconnected but there were (was?) a cluster of comments around the training having provided practical ideas and suggestions. A flavour of the issues is provided below:

- *Good to learn new ideas so that we can move forward and build on what we already know.*
- *Great fun with some very careful exploration of difficult aspects of nurturing regarding feelings and anger.*

A few (5%) offered improvement suggestions, although again there was little commonality. By way of illustration the following have been picked.

- *I would have liked to have had more information on disclosure.*
- *It was very pacey and time is needed to reflect and take it in.*

Lastly there were some points from the two days that were difficult to classify as they just represented observations and reflections. One key theme was about how to extend and sustain the training. The second was essentially linked to the non-threatening nature of the course and personal anxieties that had been allayed as a result. These are illustrated below:

- *Would like to plan follow-ups and training for those not present.*
- *Would like to be able to have repeat inputs to keep it all fresh, keep me feeling positive and remember things I have forgotten.*
- *I was quite worried at first, but because of the rules and the implementation I was able to participate without criticism despite my lack of experience.*
- *Despite my anxieties about discovering I might be a poor mother / teacher this has supported my feelings that I'm not that bad, thanks.*

6 CHILDREN'S VIEWS OF CIRCLE TIME

The classroom handbook again reinforces the importance of experiential learning in fostering emotional development.

“Learning is at its best when individuals discover from within facts and feelings about themselves and their world. Learning is a very personal experience, which integrates both thought and emotion. An emotionally healthy person knows that it is the combination of their thoughts and feelings that dictates their behaviour - at home, in school or community, and in society.”

There are activities that teachers may choose to use, particularly for art and craft activities to address key issues. The emphasis however is on circle time as the main vehicle for delivery of the programme

“The Nurturing Programme's Circle Time, supported by games, creative activities and fun, is the pivotal element in improving children's emotional health. With the teacher as a non-authoritarian facilitator, the circle emphasises equality and group responsibility based on honesty and trust.”

To determine the views of the children concerned we organised four focus group sessions. These involved children from Years 2, 4 & 6. Sessions were videotaped, and transcribed prior to analysis. These children were also asked to write postcards describing their experience of circle time. The instructions were simply:

“I would like you to imagine that you have a friend in Australia. If you were to send them a postcard, what would you tell them about circle time? It doesn't need to be very long, just something about circle time”.

The older (year 4 and year 6) children wrote their comments independently. Arrangements for year 2 pupils were similar, but instead of writing responses themselves staff wrote them on their behalf. As might have been anticipated some did not seem to offer many (any) real insight into how they perceived circle time.

- *Circle time is going well – what do you do in your school?*

Most of the postcards constituted single sentence responses but some of the older children rose to the challenge and offered detailed commentaries.

- *I would like to talk about circle time. I enjoy circle time quite a lot at our school especially when people - who have fallen out - make up with each other. We play a game, which are usually very fun at the beginning and end of the session, and the best thing is that at the end of it we are all friends.*
- *I am having a good time at school; we have started a new class activity called circle time. What we have to do is talk about problems that we have with friends, we start and end with a game, which is fun. Also we pass a shell, which I find helps everyone with their listening skills.*

Within these quotes key themes seem to be emerging. We attempted to build on these by incorporating the feedback from the focus group sessions. The approach adopted was based on principles associated with “*Grounded Theory*” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Whilst we may have our own views about the importance of circle time, we have tried to stay within the issues identified by the children. Consequently we would argue that these are themes that have arisen from the data rather ones that have been imposed.

6.1 WHAT DO YOU DO IN CIRCLE TIME?

Circle time was fundamentally portrayed as an enjoyable and fun experience. Children seemed to focus on it being a time in which there were opportunities for playing games, making things and singing songs together.

- *Circle time is good because we have a great teacher and we have a load of fun.*
- *It's good because we play games and talk about important things.*
- *Sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes we do things like change places if you had some toast for breakfast or something.*

As the last comment indicates, circle time also presents an opportunity to share confidences and talk about feelings and the troubles they are having. Insightfully, one child also added that these were - *things we don't normally talk about*. Sessions were perceived either to offer free reign to talk about issues causing them concern or were structured by the school staff to explore particular issues.

- *You can talk about your problems.*
- *A time for people to tell others how they feel inside.*
- *We usually talk about what stuff troubles us, or the teacher gives us a certain subject.*
- *We talk about problems that we have with friends and people who aren't friends.*

Understand friendship skills

In terms of content it was thought that a key focus was on helping the children understand friendship skills. This was not abstract but was perceived to help them become more successful in making friends or strengthening friendship bonds.

- *Circle time is a special place to make more friends and learn more things about making friends.*

In some cases sessions had used puppets and role-play to explore what was happening and to model how situations might be managed in more socially appropriate ways.

- *The teacher would pick one or two of us and we acted something out so four people would act out the bad thing, and then the teacher would pick another four people and they would act out the good thing you could do.*
- *We do things like how to make friends and all stuff like that. We have these puppet things, Angelica, Beaky and Douglas.*

In fact, puppets appeared to be a common occurrence and could be used to explore some sensitive issues, as the following dialogue (from a Year 2 pupil) indicates:

We have these two little puppets that perform plays for us and they want to trick us but we're always too clever for them. There's a puffin and there's a bear. They're called Pete and Rosie. Pete is really naughty; he always does the naughty things in the play. Once he was whacking his mummy because he wanted ice cream before dinner, and his mum said no and he kept whacking her and kicking her.

I: So what happened?

He didn't have any ice cream at all and he said that wasn't fair. And we told him what he should have done.

I: And what was that?

He should have said ok maybe I could have some after dinner.

Sessions were also seen as having the ability to bring about change in how children managed their interpersonal behaviour or repaired relationships.

- *It sometimes helps with friendships and if you have had fallings out it helps to resolve it.*
- *Last week we talked about rough touch and gentle touch.*
- *We talk about when someone hurts you how you don't hurt them back and stuff like that.*

Resolving difficulties

Children also viewed it as a mechanism for resolving particular difficulties that were occurring in the playground. Regulating fights was a common theme.

- *If you have a problem you can tell the people and they will try and sort it out.*
- *Circle time helps us to stop fighting in the playground and play nicely.*

The plight of children who were upset through having been socially excluded was also being addressed in this way

- *If someone hasn't been included then we find a way or someone who would play with them.*
- *We generally give our feelings and then go back to what everyone else said about problems, how we can resolve them and this links in with our playground friends, and if you're upset you can go and talk to them.*

Another issue was perceived breaches in the rules and etiquette around playing with footballs on the playground.

- *Dealing with things which aren't meant to happen in the playground; year threes don't kick our ball away.*
- *It's sorting out my troubles. I still get angry about people kicking my ball away and I cannot find it again.*

One child indicated that Circle time had led to being better able to raise issues in class. It was also acknowledged that, whilst talking about such issues was important, it did not inevitably lead to a solution. In some cases children needed their behaviour to be regulated by adults.

- *You can talk about problems on the playground. People do listen, but sometimes they just don't do it if the teachers aren't around.*

6.2 REGULATED BY RULES

Talking about such personal issues makes everyone vulnerable and presents social threats. Interactions were made safer by having explicit rules. These were designed to ensure the experience was controlled and enabled to remain constructive. As one child emphasised, not only were there rules but they were also enforced:

- *The rules help us make friends because everyone keeps to them.*
- *Well if they don't [keep to the rules], which is very rarely, they have to sit out of the circle for a few minutes.*

One child tackled this theme in some detail and in doing so indicated that the rules had been well internalised.

Our four golden rules are:

1. *Don't laugh*
2. *It's okay to pass*
3. *Don't talk about things in the playground*
4. *Don't talk when it's not your turn.*

A key theme of the rules was the need to have a system for regulating who “had the floor” and was entitled to speak. It was also clear that classes had different systems in place to regulate the turn taking. These typically involved passing objects (balls, shells, dolphins etc). Some of these arrangements had more elaborated rules, one of which was to achieve a balanced representation between girls and boys. Children were equally clear that these were used to ensure they did not talk over other children. An emphasis was on respecting the views of others by listening to what they had to say.

- *Circle time helps us not to talk over people when they're talking and not to swing your legs.*
- *One of them was if you don't have the ball you don't speak.*
- *One was listen to others, as it could be the same thing happening to you.*
- *If you were a girl and had the ball you had to pass the ball to a boy, and if you were a boy you had to pass the ball to a girl.*

These rules seemed to have proved successful in many contexts, in that sessions were perceived to have a peaceful and calm atmosphere.

- *I love the smell of the candle. We sit together having a quiet time.*
- *We can calm down and cool down as well.*

Other rules cited by children tended to be about maintaining a positive supportive interpersonal atmosphere and respecting confidences.

- *It's a time to praise others.*
- *It is good because no one can laugh at you.*
- *Whatever is said in the circle stays in the circle.*
- *If someone did something to someone else you can't mention who it was by name.*

6.3 NEGATIVE ASPECTS

In the focus groups children were asked to rate how much they enjoyed circle time using a Likert scale 0-10 and to provide some justification for their response. Ratings were generally high and ranged from 5-10 with the mean score of 8.32. The justifications children offered provided some insight into how they really perceived these sessions.

Children who rated Circle Time most highly justified their score by suggesting that these sessions worked for them. They were able to express their feelings in a public context, this made them feel better and was empowering in that it provided a format they might be able to use independently.

- *10 – because you can say your feelings and things you didn't like and you can get them out and then feel a lot better.*
- *10 – because you got to speak all about your troubles, and if you forgot to say one of them another person would bring them up and it helped you being nice, but after the circle time you felt really good because you know how to sort out your troubles.*

These comments provided a strong endorsement for the process. Some of the justifications of more moderate scoring were more insightful about the underlying problems. To probe these further children were also asked what they disliked about circle time. Despite the direction of the question many children were willing to defend Circle time.

- *I can't think of anything that I don't like.*

A number of children were angered when others transgressed the rules of the group. This unfairness focused particularly around not being allowed a legitimate

voice. Children either spoke out of turn did not listen properly, or their turn was thwarted through other circumstances.

- *People not listening to you.*
- *I didn't like it when some of the children were being naughty and talking to each other the teacher had to talk to them and then she forgot about who was talking in circle time and would just pass it on, sometimes you got passed on in the middle of a feeling and you wanted to get it out because it was really annoying you and the teacher would just pass it on.*

Some children felt let down because the session had failed to deliver the promised change in circumstances. Another was simply jealous when they were not picked "to be special".

- *I don't like it because when somebody is chosen to be special and I'm not special.*

As might be anticipated some children were conscious that talking about feelings presented a degree of social threat. Some feared others might laugh at them; alternatively, some were concerned that comments might cause other children to become upset.

- *I don't like it when everyone stares at you.*
- *Actually I'd give it an 8 because sometimes if I said my troubles and the people who were troubling me would get all upset and say that I didn't know I was doing that and then you would feel really bad for making that other person upset, a bit like guiltiness.*
- *I wouldn't want to say my troubles I'd want to do it on my own because I wouldn't want to get that person upset by my troubles.*

The comment - *I didn't know I was doing that* – is particularly interesting in highlighting one of the strengths of the approach, namely the ability to raise issues that were unwittingly causing distress. This emotional tension was felt both by those raising concerns and those who were the subject of those concerns. Whilst it inevitably causes an element of distress it needs to be acknowledged that such dissonance is largely responsible for bringing about change.

- *You feel a bit uncomfortable sometimes, because you know it's about you, but the whole class hears about it.*

Children also made the point that sometimes it was just hard to express your feelings. Again, whilst this is fundamentally true, developing the skills to talk about emotional issues is one of the aims and it is a difficult skill to master.

- *It's quite hard sometimes if you really want to say something but you're almost afraid to say it, and sometimes it can be quite fun just playing the games, and at the end everyone is our friend and everyone's problems are solved so that's quite nice.*
- *I don't really like saying my troubles.*

For others it was more simply that it could come at times when they had nothing particularly pressing to say or did not want to talk about things. This made them feel awkward, despite staff legitimising the right to say nothing.

- *You can't think of anything to say when it comes round to your turn.*
- *Sometimes you don't want to talk about it.*

In conclusion several children made the point that sitting in a group listening to others talking about their feelings and concerns could simply be boring. This was particularly the case where they felt they were covering content that had been explored before.

- *I would say 5 probably because sometimes it's fun but it can be very boring just sitting there all the time. You can just sit there doing nothing.*
- *Well we have 28 people in our class and with everyone talking that means you have to wait for 27 people to talk before I talk and sometimes I do get a bit bored*
- *We just talk about the same things, maybe something different every week that we can talk about.*

In looking at improvement suggestions, one of the points was again the wish to have more variety in the focus of what was being done.

- *If we had a book, our teacher would refer to, and each week would be a different subject. So we focused on anti-smoking, and all the range to bullying.*

6.4 WHAT WOULD MAKE CIRCLE TIME BETTER?

Suggestions to improve circle time addressed many of the shortcomings previously identified. Most comments made the point that to function well everyone needed to respect the rules and not talk, whisper, fidget or nudge others whilst

people were talking. This highlights the need for staff to maintain appropriate control over the proceedings.

- *People keep chatting in my ear and I just ignore them.*
- *Some people fidget a bit and sometimes they sort of move over and they'll be nudging me.*
- *Sometimes people get a bit sad, because if someone has got something really important to say - like at home - if next door someone's face is through the window - and you get really sad if it's something important sometimes people do whisper 'that's a bit silly', and even though we talk about that people still sometimes do it.*

Echoing an earlier point the issue was raised that whilst children might agree to a variety of corrective measures within the context of the session they needed to take more seriously the obligation to put these into practice.

- *During break we have playground friends, but some people go to playground friends, and then they're just not bothered to deal with it, they just want to play, and they say that they are a playground bully and they aren't doing their job properly.*

6.5 HAS CIRCLE TIME MADE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU?

As might be anticipated, the answer to this rather loaded question was almost universally that circle time had made a difference but there was some variation in the degree of impact.

- *Yeah, it's made a big, big, big difference.*
- *It does make a difference, but only a slight difference though.*

In both of these cases no further elaboration was offered. Some children talked about the nature of the impact, suggesting that it had fostered a kinder, more caring ethos.

- *I think it's made people kinder, they make jokes up or are nice about it.*

Interestingly, several children indicated that the sessions had given them strategies to help regulate their own behaviour. Use of the concepts of choice and consequences was often used in this self-regulation.

- *It makes a difference because if we're playing a game in the playground and it gets too rough we would*

- *It's a choice if you do a good thing or a bad thing. Say if I punched another child it's either a choice if he punches me back or tells on me. And the good choice is to tell and the bad choice is to punch me back, because if he punches me back he's in trouble, but if he tells then I'll be in trouble and he won't be in any trouble.*
- *Well sometimes when we go to our tables we have to do stuff we have to make things, if you're silly and you've got some people in our class who mess about with pens and pencils and the choice is to either mess about the pens and pencils or to be good and put them in the pots.*

6.6 HOW OFTEN DO YOU HAVE CIRCLE TIME?

In response to the question about how circle time could be improved several children mentioned that they would simply like to have more sessions or, in some cases, have sessions reinstated. We consequently asked how often sessions were happening. The frequency with which Circle Time was actually happening was extremely varied. Some children indicated that it was now quite a rare event although it had been more frequent in the past. This was particularly the case for older children; presumably as the curriculum demands became more intense.

- *We haven't had it for ages.*
- *In year 5 we had it once every week, but now we have it only once every two months.*

In many cases children looked back fondly on this experience.

- *I think we should have circle time back, because when we had our old teacher we had circle time every Friday and we sat down and said all our feelings in a big circle.*
- *I used to enjoy circle time, because if I had a worry on my mind, I used to ask a question about it then sort it out, but we don't usually have circle time anymore.*
- *I think it's a bit unfair now, they're thinking that the year 4s are lot responsibler than the year 3s, which ok they kind of are, not trying to boast or anything, so we don't have circle time, they think that we're too sensible so we've probably sorted out all our problems, but actually we're not sorting it out at all.*

For others it was a more common occurrence, typically forming part of a weekly timetable. Interestingly even children in Year 2 were conscious of the competing

pressure on the school curriculum and felt that it was something beginning to be forced out by other demands.

- *We don't often have much time in year 2 so we end up having it once a week, but if we did have time we'd probably do it once a day, but I don't think we have enough time.*

7 DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst the parenting aspect of the Nurturing Programme was not explored in this study, the literature review indicated its strong endorsement from parents (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001 and Osgood & James, 2006). Parents felt that the programme had introduced them to new strategies, which had helped them 'find a way forward'. Much of this had been mediated through opportunities to reflect on their experience of having been parented (from which much of the expertise derived). This understanding had led to beneficial changes. They felt empowered and reported improved relationships with partners. They indicated that they had a better insight into the feelings of their children and perceived the behaviour they exhibited to have subsequently been less demanding. Headteachers reported they had managed to involve many hard to reach families (DfES, 2003). Moreover they were willing to recruit home-school links workers in order to maintain this work. This conflicts slightly with Eade (2006) who found that all but a few schools had been able to maintain parent groups. Where this happened it was dependant on a committed parent group leader. Taken together these results suggest that if schools are serious about introducing this initiative they need to invest in the necessary infrastructure to support it. It is not an initiative that will be maintained under its own momentum.

This study focussed upon the school-based programme. Again there is a growing body of evidence about the impact of the programme on schools. MacNeill (2005) and Eade (2006) found that teachers perceived the programme to have given them strategies to promote the social, emotional and behavioural development of children. The programme was also judged to have had a positive effect on children's emotional literacy and on school culture.

The first of the research questions was whether staff considered the programme useful. The results suggested that staff were overwhelmingly positive about the programme. On average 35% of respondents rated the content to be "extremely useful" and 61% rated it as

“useful”. Hence a total of about 96% of the ratings could be deemed positive. Unsolicited responses in the open-ended section also indicated that staff seemed confident and motivated about applying the techniques introduced (over 70%). A further group (about 20%) were more qualified in their enthusiasm but they were still looking to introduce the approach after preparatory work.

In respect to the question about what aspects staff found most useful, ideas for *self-esteem*, *collaborative rewards* and *choices & consequences* from Day 1 and *work breaks and games*; *Using ‘I’ statements* and *Managing Anger* from Day 2 were rated most highly. Many of these also featured in the general feedback about what new ideas they had taken from the training. One of the overarching themes was how to communicate more effectively with children. Feedback on listening skills was frequently cited, as was the language of “*choice*” (see above). The importance of using ‘I’ statements was so prevalent that we recorded this as a distinct category. Participants also felt that they had been given a range of practical ideas to use, better insight into the behaviour of children and the nature of underlying emotions. The language of choices and consequences featured strongly. However, it was not rated the most useful strategy as had been found in other studies (Weare & Stratford, 2004 and Eade, 2006).

An unanticipated outcome was that about 14% of respondents (primarily teachers) indicated they were already familiar with much of the content. However this was not mentioned negatively. Many welcomed being reminded of approaches and found jointly training with other colleagues valuable in establishing a shared language for considering behaviour (also in Eade, 2006).

The size of this sample (261) was encouragingly high. However it needs to be acknowledged it only included staff from the Andover area. The views of staff in other areas of the country may differ depending on the availability of training. In addition it is relatively easy to rate training positively, particularly where the session has gone well and presented an enjoyable experience. The more critical questions are whether it actually changes practice and whether the approach ultimately improves outcomes for children. As a cautionary note, Eade (2006) found no obvious evidence of impact in the school’s performance indicators. In fact one of the biggest gaps in the literature is evidence of impact in respect to the ECM outcomes (DfES, 2004).

Children perceived circle time positively and frequently regretted that they did not happen more regularly. On a scale of 0-10 ratings had a mean of 8.32. Children portrayed sessions as enjoyable experiences in which they could share their feelings and talk about troubles. The focus was seen to be helping them develop social skills and sessions were perceived to have the capacity to bring about change in how they managed their interpersonal behaviour. A mechanism for resolving difficulties occurring in the playground was a common theme.

In terms of concerns children were angered when others broke the rules. This unfairness focussed around not being permitted a legitimate voice or in some cases that it failed to deliver promised changes. Children were also conscious of the vulnerability inherent in talking about their feelings. They acknowledged that it was often hard to express your feelings. Listening to everyone else was also quite boring for some children.

Comments provided a strong endorsement for the process. However the main implication was that to function well staff have a responsibility to maintain appropriate control over the proceedings.

8 MAIN LEARNING POINTS

1. The Nurturing Programme appears a good vehicle for training staff about behavioural and emotional issues. Staff were overwhelmingly positive about the programme with 96% rating the content as either “useful” or “extremely useful” and over 70% reporting that they were confident and motivated to apply the techniques.
2. About 14% of school staff (primarily teachers) reported already being familiar with some of the content. However the experiential nature of the training made re-visiting themes acceptable. They also found training with a wider group of colleagues valuable in establishing a shared understanding and a whole school approach.
3. Much of the Nurturing Programme is mediated through circle time. Children perceived these sessions positively and on average rated it as 8.32 (on a scale of 0-10). Unfairness around not being permitted a legitimate voice was their main area of concern

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