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Evaluating a Gift for Family Literacy: Challenges and opportunities



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Context

- Evaluation of a book gifting programme for disadvantaged 2YO (2YO) children in 4 ECEC settings
- Funded research: commissioned by an English local authority
- The local authority worked with a book gifting charity: **Bookfun***
- The selected 2YO children were ‘disadvantaged’ and were in ECEC settings in one county for 15 hours per week, funded by government for school readiness
- The **Bookfun** book gifting programme was already in place for all babies and all 4-year-old children (school starters) in the county

(*pseudonym)



Who are the 'disadvantaged' 2YOs?

Some 2YOs in England are offered free early education and childcare if...

- Their parents receive specified benefits
- They are looked after by a local council
- They have a current statement of Special Educational Needs or an education health and care plan
- They receive Disability Living Allowance
- They have left care under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or adoption order

(HM Government, 2015)



Bookfun*

The **Bookfun*** charity's rationale is to '...inspire a love of reading that will give children a flying start in life and to help families enjoy reading together every day' (Bookfun* 2014)

Bookfun* provides:

- Free books
- Support and guidance for parents about early reading,
- Recommendations of books to suit children's ages and interests
- Online activities and books and events in children's centres and libraries
- Opportunities for families can meet

(*pseudonym)



Booktime*

Bookfun* is part of the **Booktime*** charity whose vision is '*...of a society where nobody misses out on the life-changing benefits that reading can bring*' (**Booktime*** 2014)

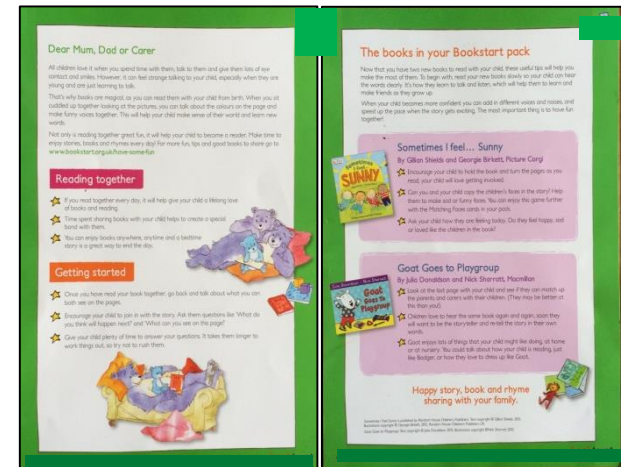
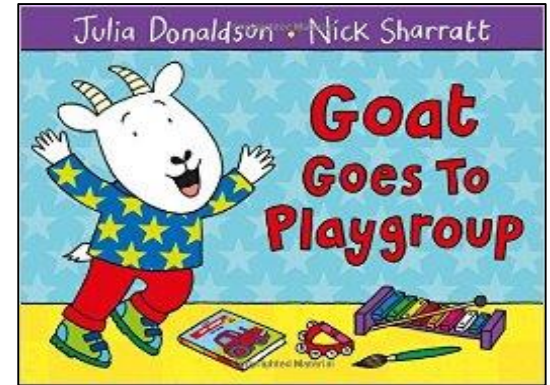
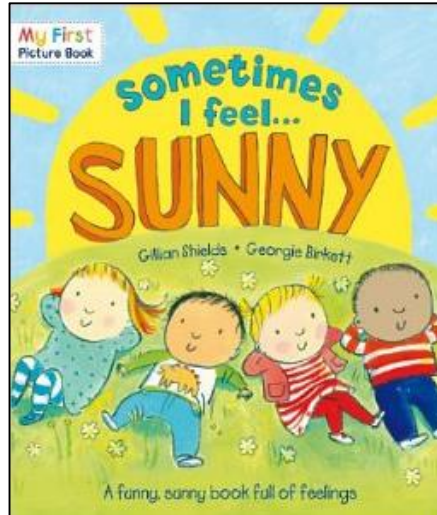
Booktime* (2014):

- Works with 'Children - because they present the greatest opportunity to change lives'
- Works with 'Families - because this is the unit for the greatest impact'
- Regards family reading and access to books as catalysts for social mobility, enhanced social and emotional wellbeing, stronger family relationships and improved life chances
- Regards literacy as a right

(*pseudonym)



The Bookfun 2YO Bag



Study Aim and Objectives

In accordance with the commissioner's requirements:

Aim

To evaluate the implementation of the **Bookfun** 2YO Bag for children with free early years entitlement in identified settings, including perspectives regarding its impact on communication and language and personal, social and emotional development of children in those settings

Contd...



Study Objectives

- 1) To establish the views of parents/carers and practitioners on any impact the **Bookfun** 2YO Bag has had on communication and language development (CLD) and personal, social and emotional development (PSED) of children in identified settings.
- 2) To find out if parents/carers have adjusted their children's Home Learning Environment as a result of using the **Bookfun** 2YO Bag and if so, what changes they have made, and how they used elements in the Bag.
- 3) To identify how Communication Champions in settings supported parents/carers, children and practitioners in the implementation of the **Bookfun** 2YO Bag.



A Theoretical Framework...

Extant studies around family literacy and book gifting

Booktime's claims are well supported in regard to ...

- Social mobility (Levy et al., 2014)
 - Parents reading to children as an indicator for reading through the life course (Gleed, 2013).
 - Habitual reading linked to socio-economic status (Gleed, 2013).
 - Value of family literacy (Hannon, Morgan and Nutbrown, 2006)
- contd...



Extant studies around book gifting

Positive correlations between...

- Early access to books, family reading + children's school success (Wade and Moore, 2000)
- Book gifting in the early years + literacy attainment (Burnett, Daniels and Bailey, 2014; Demack and Stevens, 2013)
- Book gifting + shared reading between parents and children 0-5 years (Venn, 2014)
- Book gifting +
 - story-telling
 - reading
 - positive attitudes about reading among parents
 - increases in parents' knowledge and confidence (Wylie, 2014)



However...

- Poor engagement in book gifting programmes of disadvantaged groups and weak follow-up of families (Wylie, 2014)
- Barriers preventing parents from sharing books with their babies (Venn, 2014)

Extant studies regarding Access and Attitudes to Books

Positive correlations between

- Children's and parents' positive attitudes to books + children's later literacy attainment (Clark and Dezoysa, 2011; OECD, 2012)

Positive correlations between children's later success as readers +

- Parents' own reading
- The number of books in the household
- Parents reading with their children



(Bus, van Ijzendoorn and Pelligrini, 1995; Clark, Osborne and Dugdale, 2009; Evans, Kelley and Sikora, 2014; Neuman, 1999)

Extant studies around the home learning environment (HLE)

Specific early learning activities in the HLE with a strong language focus correlate with successful educational outcomes

(Hunt, Virgo, Klett-Davis, Page and Apps, 2010; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2010)

e.g.

- ‘...reading to a child, playing with numbers and letters, drawing and going to the library

(Hunt et al, 2010:7)

- ‘...singing songs and nursery rhymes, playing with friends’

(Sylva *et al.*, 2010: 61)



Links between early Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) and later success

- At the request of the commissioner, this study included focus on children's PSED in relation to the **Bookfun** 2YO Programme
- PSED has been correlated with successful educational and lifelong outcomes

(Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger, 2011; Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015; Winnicott 1953)



Methodology

- Pluralistic qualitative approach (Frost et al., 2010; Patton, 2002)
- Summative outcome-impact evaluation (Trochim, 2006)
- Six methods :
 - ✓ (1) documentary evidence of 2YOs' development
 - ✓ (2) practitioner surveys
 - ✓ (3) parent/carer surveys
 - ✓ (4) parent/carer interviews (in family homes)
 - ✓ (5) an audit of early home literacy activities (in family homes)
 - ✓ (6) practitioner focus group



Participants

- Purposive sample identified by the commissioner
- Early Years Settings (n=4: varied type and quality)
- Parents/carers with 2YOs in funded ECEC (n=6)
- Practitioners (n=20, including 4 Communication Champions and 4 Setting leaders):
 - ✓ Daisy Setting (n=5)
 - ✓ Tulip Setting (n=5)
 - ✓ Rose Setting (n=5)
 - ✓ Violet Setting (n=5)



Ethics

- ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2012) guided the project, with particular care that...
- No harm was done to participants
- Participants gave voluntary, informed consent to participate
- Sensitivity to family life and individuals was continually exercised
- Participants' rights to withdraw were respected.
- No participant is identifiable in outputs



Findings: Opportunities (1)

Findings relating to Objective 1

1) To establish the views of parents/carers and practitioners on any impact the **BOOKfun** 2YO Bag has had on communication and language development (CLD) and personal, social and emotional development (PSED) of children in identified settings.

Parents and practitioners thought the funded 2YO children had progressed in their CLD and PSED, as well as aspects of Literacy Development (LD) and suggested ways that the **BOOKfun** 2YO Bag had impacted on this progress.



Findings: Opportunities (2)

Findings relating to Objective 2...

2) To find out if parents/carers have adjusted their children's HLE as a result of using the **BOOKfun** 2YO Bag and if so, what changes they have made, and how they used elements in the Bag.

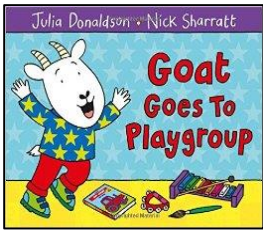
Parents/carers and practitioners suggested that adjustments have been made by some parents to their children's HLE as a result of using the **BOOKfun** 2YO Bag, e.g:

- *'It's given us the opportunity to sit together and do the colours, talk about the different animals and animal noises.'*
(Parent T2)
- *'...He's more interested now in talking about what's in books'*
(PIT2/3)

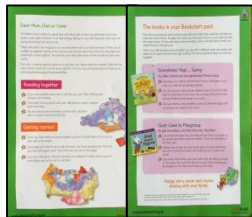


More Findings relating to Objective 2

*To find out if parents/carers have adjusted their children's HLE as a result of using the **Bookfun** 2YO Bag and if so, what changes they have made, and how they used elements in the Bag, e.g.*



- **'Goat goes to Playgroup' book:** Parents said '(My child) looked at this one more – he pointed them out and pointed and said the noises' (PIT2/29) and '(My child) loves this one at bedtime' – it helped to establish a bedtime routine (PIT8/40)



- **Parent Information Card:** parents' views diverged between finding it useful (PIT2/31) and just reinforcing what they did in any case (PIT8/43)



- **CD and rhyme card:** one parent said she used it a lot and had downloaded the songs onto her phone (PIT2/33), but another could not use it because her CD player was broken (PIT8/45)



- **Matching Faces Game:** parents had not found it very successful (PIT2/35) (PIT8/47)

Findings: Opportunities (3)

Findings relating to Objective 3

3) To identify how Communication Champions in settings supported parents/carers, children and practitioners in the implementation of the **BOOKfun** 2YO Bag.

Parents and practitioners identified 13 key points suggesting how they thought Communication Champions supported parents, children and practitioners in the implementation of the **BOOKfun** 2YO bag as well as other aspects of their work in settings.



Findings: Opportunities (4)

The Operation of the *BOOKfun* 2YO Programme

Three key aspects emerged in regard to the operation of the *BOOKfun* 2YO Programme: delivery, access and quality.

In regard to quality..

- Practitioners and parents thought the quality of the *BOOKfun* 2YO bags was high and the bags and their contents were generally appropriate.
- Practitioners made a few suggestions for developing the contents, including dual language, a 'feely' book, online resources and paper and crayons.



Findings: Challenges

The Operation of the Bookfun 2YO Programme

In regard to delivery and access...

- Settings received their bookbags at different points in the year, creating inequity for 2YOs in one English county
- Practitioners were not sure how the families had received their *BOOKfun* 2YO Bags or how many children and families had received the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bags.
- The Communication Champions did not present many of the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bags to children or parents
- Most parents did not know whether or not their child's setting Communication Champion gave them the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bag
- Whilst some practitioners who presented the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bags explained the aim of the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bags to parents, others did not.

Contd...



Contd...

- Practitioners said the *BOOKfun* 2YO offer should be universal because all 2YOs would benefit
- Practitioners identified tensions in their settings when presenting the 2YO Bookbags only to funded 2YOs
- Practitioners preferred the 4YO model.
- A parent said that she thought the *BOOKfun* 2YO offer should be universal.

With regard to quality...

- Parents found the Matching Faces game was not age appropriate.



Challenges relating to the research (1)

The commissioners required that their own advisors act as gatekeepers; this proved problematic...

- It inhibited relationships
- It slowed the research process

Uncertainty regarding numbers of families in the research (commissioners and practitioners)



Challenges relating to the research (2)

- 30 parents of funded 2YOs consented to their children's data being contributed anonymously to the project
- 19 parents of funded 2YOs signed consent forms to participate in the parents' telephone survey
- ✓ Daisy Setting: n=2
- ✓ Rose Setting: 0
- ✓ Tulip Setting: n=10
- ✓ Violet Setting: n=7
- 5 did not provide a phone number
- Although 3 provided an e-mail address which was used to try to arrange the telephone survey, none responded.
- 8 did not respond to two rounds of text and voice mail requests to arrange their telephone surveys
- Ethically, it was not appropriate to pursue the parents
- 6 parents participated



Meeting the Study Aim

Aim: To evaluate the implementation of the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bag for children with free early years' entitlement in identified settings, including perspectives regarding its impact on the CLD and PSED of children in those settings.

- Whilst parents and practitioners identified some operational issues relating to delivery and access, they found the quality of the bag and its contents to be high overall.
- Parents and practitioners thought funded 2YO children had progressed in their CLD and PSED over the time of the programme, plus aspects of Literacy Development (LD); some suggested ways that the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bag had impacted on this progress. However...



1) The disparity across the 4 identified settings regarding when children received the 2YO bags meant that opportunities were not sufficiently equal to demonstrating impact the B *BOOKfun* 2YO Bag had on CLD and PSED of children in identified settings

(2) The varied nature and form of EYFS assessment data from the 4 settings was too disparate to show CLD and PSED progress for all settings or to compare progress across the settings.

(3) During the time of the *BOOKfun* 2YO Programme, the funded 2YO children also had many other experiences in settings and at home. Therefore, it is not possible to isolate if and how the *BOOKfun* 2YO Bag has impacted on the 2YO children's CLD and PSED.

Nevertheless, the study aim was met.



19 Recommendations for policy and practice

These included:

- All settings should receive their bookbags at the same time
- The *BOOKfun* 2YO offer should be universal
- Settings in the study county should use one method to collate and report their ECEC assessments
- *BOOKfun* might include a ‘feely’ book, dual language books, online resources, materials for families with EAL and paper and crayons.
- Practitioners and parents should receive support and guidance to maximise the 2YO Bookbag
- The Communication Champion role should be clearly defined in each setting.



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