Family Literacy Fun
ESRC Festival of Social Science

Evaluation Report

Around 150 families, and a total of 400 people (aged from 3 months to 80+ years) attended the School of Education Family Literacy Fun Day at the Winter Garden, Sheffield on the 2nd November 2013.

Overview and aims of the event

This event took the form of a ‘literacy fun day’ organised in the centre of the City of Sheffield to maximise public engagement. The indoor venue of the Sheffield Winter Garden was filled with literacy-oriented activities for parents, carers and their young children to do and enjoy together. Activities included a ‘literacy trail’ which included making recordings of rhymes and songs, a story corner run by Sheffield Library service, a nursery rhyme trail where children looked for the Three Bears, Bo Peep’s sheep and the Wolf from Red Riding Hood.

Leaflets for parents about children’s literacy and small literacy oriented gifts were available for children to take home. Children completing the trail received a specially-made medallion to mark their participation.

The thematic event derives from research which has demonstrated the impact of working with families when children are very young in order to support effective early literacy development. This particular element of Social Science research was promoted by the information about work carried out in a recent ESRC funded project *A Framework for Early Literacy Development with Parents: Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Models* for which Cathy Nutbrown was recently awarded the *ESRC Prize for Research with Outstanding Impact on Society.*
The target audience was the families of young children, and the anticipated attendance of 50 was well exceeded, with an estimated 150+ families (a total of some 400 people). Being a popular and attractive thoroughfare, the city centre Winter Garden was an excellent venue, attracting a good level of participation from families passing incidentally through, and those who had received information and made a point of coming. There was probably a 50:50 representation of these two groups.

School of Education staff (5) and students (15) in collaboration with practitioners from local schools and nurseries (4), the Sheffield Library service (1) and other volunteers (6) were available to help with activities and talk with parents about the findings of the research, and offer suggestions about what they can do to support their children’s literacy.

Evaluation was threefold: comment boards (which many children used), comment cards (which 52 parents wrote on), a photographic record of the event.

We asked those who took part in our Family Literacy Trail to write us a brief comment at the end.
Parents wrote:

Very well organised and a lot of fun. Thanks for organising it. Kept the kids (5 and 3) amused for well over an hour.

Edith and Stanley really enjoyed.

We have really enjoyed today, it showed that a lot of time and enough went into this and the 3 children I brought all had a great time (aged 3 – 7). I would love it if Sheffield set up an email to contact parents. I would have been sad to miss this.

Fun and attractive – my daughter really enjoyed the activities.

A fun day out – The children really enjoyed it – some good ideas to take home to bring books, reading – literacy alive. Good fun, Thanks x

A great initiative! Really enjoyed it.

Kian really had a good time and so did mum. It was really good fun so glad I came.

My 5 year old had a lovely time. She really enjoyed the story corner.
Lovely idea, we especially liked finding the bears, sheep and wolf and getting stickers. Thanks

My son enjoyed it and everyone staffing the event was incredibly kind. Thank you

My daughter really enjoyed the literacy trail – thank you very much!

‘REALLY EXCITING!’ (Isobel age 3) Sorry we didn’t have time to do all the activities.

Absolutely fantastic day, a lifesaver and something educational for children to do. Wish it was more often! Well organised. Loved the foam alphabet game. Thank you.

Creative and innovative ways of learning. Great stuff! Need more of it!

We really enjoyed the trail. Thank you. Eva (2 years 9 months) Graham (30 years, 6 months) Tim (28 years, 9 months)
Miguelle enjoyed the trail it was gun for her. Miquelle is 4.

Really enjoyed the ‘hands on’ activities! Thank you.

Today was really lovely, the kids enjoyed it very much. I would definitely come again.

Thank you very much for giving your time up. Most enjoyable, all the brownies really enjoyed the time here. Margaret

Very nice activity for kids she enjoyed it very much... Thanks xxx

Lots of engaging activities which the children enjoyed taking part in.

We all had a lovely time – took away some good ideas about games and literacy. Thank you!

Thank you. What a lovely treat!

Excellent day. The 4 year old had a great time more please!
Thanks you for entertaining 1st Lea and Hollaway Brownies, They have had great fun. Brown Owl (Doc).

Brilliant for promoting early reading and language. Ellona really had fun. I feel I must ‘borrow’ your idea doe my stay and play with my early years class. Mark

Thank you! What a fantastic day. We’ve had a wonderful time, and have spent 3 hours utterly mesmerised and fully absorbed by the activities and opportunities for engagement and learning. Our son (age 2½ ) struggles with shyness and timidity at such events, but has had the time of his life here today! We’ve never seen him so confident and absorbed and happy. Everything has been so well planned and well run, and we as adults have enjoyed it as much as the little ones. All the staff and students are fantastic. Keep up the amazing work everyone! Emily, Mark and Francis xxx

Literacy Day! What a wonderful idea, and so beautifully done.

A really good idea to keep kids entertained and interested in literacy.

Dylan thought it was fun. Favourite one was finding the sheep.

I thought it was wonderful. Favourite one was finding the teddy bears
Really great time. Makes the children think and look around to find all the items.

Staff were very friendly  
Good days fun

Lovely, imaginative activities - my 6 and 8 year olds loved it. Nice ideas, and especially loved Bo Peep, Goldilocks and Red Riding Hood. And radio shack v. cool!

It was wonderful to come to such a lovely place where children are having fund and learning... ;)}
What absolutely wonderful way to entertain my three year old while we wait for mummy to have her hair cut? Thank you very much. Ruby, Sadie and Pops

Really enjoyed our day. Loads to do lots of fun Natalie (Mum) and Amari (son)

Good idea, very friendly volunteers. Thank you.

It was great fun. Enjoyed it so much. Thank you so much xxx

Very nice event for the children where they have the opportunity to share and learn. Lovely activities.

Very interesting – good to learn how easy it is to develop language.

Brilliant! We’ve had a lovely time – activities here all great to join in. The dressing up and big blue bear terrific fun! Thank you very much.

An experience to remember! Lots of fun and easily accessible for our 4 year old. Many thanks
Today was a lovely experience and all my 3 children enjoyed the activities, especially little red riding hood and goldilocks. Very enjoyable indeed. (Wahid, Alishia, Ethan, Mollie, Arabella)

Children wrote:

its good we have a nise time

I enjoyed it very much an enjoyed it.
Very good

They should do it more often.

I had fun thanks

It is were gud.

It was fun

I reely enjoy this.

Thank you I liked it lots!
I enjoyed my self and it was supper.

I really enjoyed especially. I really like it; it was sad.
I've had so much fun! I thought it was good and fun!

I had good time and well comeback.

so much fun! I thought it was great fun!

I thought it was fun finding things!!!

I thought it was really fun. Sounds great!
Conclusion

The comments and images demonstrate that many families really did have ‘fun’ with early literacy activities. The event took considerable planning and only happened because of the many people who contributed. There are many people to thank:

Angela Gower (Sheffield City Council) for the free use of the Winter Garden. Angela, the horticulturalists and the City Ambassadors were most helpful in making the venue available and ensuring it ‘worked’ for us.

Anne Ford (Sheffield City Libraries) told stories for four and a half hours – to children who were captivated. She also ensured a visit from the Big Blue Library Bear – which the children were really excited about.

Students on the BA in Education Culture and Childhood wore our specially made, highly visible green T-shirts and helped families with the activities. They did a fantastic job and so thank you to: Hannah Twyford, Tara Foley. Rebekah Hunt, Amy Walpole, Chor Yee Pui, Kirsty Child, Ella Stanway, Sophie Williamson, Jennifer McGuffin, Jodie Edward, Chloe Patterson and Francesca Weber.

The School of Education team involved in helping Professor Cathy Nutbrown prepare for the event, setting up and working with families throughout the day included: Dylan Yamada Rice, Lisa Procter, Judi Duffield, Peter Clough, Julia Bishop, Lyndsey Farnsworth, and Karen Kitchen.

Charlotte Pickering from Fired Arts, Sheffield helped children decorate around 200 letters to take home as a memory from the day, she was assisted by Charlotte and Maddie Robinson. Bo Peep, Goldilocks and Little Red Riding Hood were played by Beth Nutbrow, Jenny Utting and Lydia Robinson; they thanked children for finding their sheep, bears and the wolf by giving them stickers to help them complete the literacy trail.
Mandy Forster and Claire Boardman from Grace Owen Nursery School played games with environmental print and talked with many parents about literacy fun ideas families could do at home. Their ‘tweet’ to families meant that several families from their setting made a point of visiting the Winter Garden on 2nd November and were glad they did!

This was a team effort involving many people and many hours of work; the contributions from those involved ensured that the ESRC grant for the event was used to maximum effect.

Thanks to those who helped create and run the event and to the families who joined us. In the words on one young participant: ‘It was epic fun’.

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*Professor Cathy Nutbrown*

*School of Education*

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*18th November 2013*