Co-producing family literacy research in prisons

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Background to *FliP*

Four previously funded research projects since 1997

- *The Raising Early Achievement in Literacy Project (REAL)* [Nuffield 1997- 2002]
- *A Framework for Early Literacy Work with Families* [ESRC 2011 –2012]
- *ORIM: New Directions and Networks* [Collaborative R&D and Partnership Award 2012 –2013]
- *Booktrust Storytour* [Commissioned research 2013- 2014]

The findings from, and experience of, these four projects above put us in a position further to develop work from the original project and to do three new and important things:

- To develop ways of working specifically with fathers in prison
- To develop a new collaboration with PACT – a national charity which supports people affected by imprisonment.
- To identify and seek to overcome ways of carrying out research in high-risk situations where there is potential for many challenges related to the prison context.
FLiP Research Questions

- In the event of their imprisonment, how can ‘absent’ fathers be supported in their vital contribution to young children’s literacy development?

- Can an established and effective programme be adapted and run successfully to the benefit of prisoners and their families?
Approach

- The project was run in two men’s prisons (currently anonymous until National Offenders Management Service approves our report.

- Professional development was provided for Pact family workers focussing on: the original family literacy programme, ways of working on early literacy with families, and how this might be adapted for prison contexts. This capacity-building collaboration enhanced the potential for impact through sustainability from the outset.

- Learning opportunities for the Sheffield team included induction into practices of working in prisons, and ongoing advice and support through working alongside Pact colleagues.
What did we do?

Over a 5-month period, Pact workers and the Sheffield team planned and delivered a series of six jointly run full day workshops for male prisoners and six specifically designed literacy-oriented family visits for prisoners and their families.

The focus in both workshops and family visits was early literacy development.
Pact recruited men, following usual process for Pact prison interventions, in collaboration with the Security Department. Open to all, over 90 men were recruited; some were not granted clearance and participant numbers in one workshop was reduced due to a wing ‘lock down’. Target numbers were reached.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prison</th>
<th>Numbers participating</th>
<th>Ethnicity of men</th>
<th>Ages of men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men completing FLiP</td>
<td>Partners /carers attending family day</td>
<td>Children attending family day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals for both</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluative data included:
- observations,
- interviews with the fathers,
- questionnaires to partners/carers,
- comments from the children,
- demographics of male prisoners
- a full account of the family days.
analysis

Fifty-eight of the 74 men were judged to participate at high or fairly high levels of participation, over 78%, and sixty-nine men were judged to participate at moderate to high levels of participation, over 93%.
### Analysis

**Thematic analysis of perspectives of prisoners, partners and children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspectives of</th>
<th>involvement, bonding, spending time as a family</th>
<th>appreciation and style of the day</th>
<th>Early literacy</th>
<th>Children’s learning and development generally</th>
<th>future intentions and role as a father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers /carers</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Children’s perspectives

Children’s perspectives on the literacy-oriented family visit were obtained from 35 children, around 34% of those visiting. The children’s responses were coded into two themes: i. ‘spending time with daddy’, having fun and feeling happy, iii. the activities and books.

- I’ve loved today with my dad
- I got to make loads of fun stuff with my dad
- I miss playing with you dad. I want to go camping with you. I need your help. When are you coming home dad? This was fun!
- I feel very happy to spend time with daddy
- I loved today it was the best day ever. I also feel so happy, excited and amazing
- Loved it
- It was really fun. We did some activities ... It was a good day
Mothers/carers’ perspectives

Thirty one mothers/carers (some 41%) offered their views on the literacy-oriented family visit.

- The day was most definitely worthwhile. Felt my daughter got a lot of valuable bonding time with her father.
- Being able to spend time as a family again meant so much.
- It’s good for the kids to get to bond with their fathers for longer than an hour.
- It felt like we were at home with our boys, playing and having fun.
- I think family days are for dad to build a bond with their children.
- I think this has been great for R and for myself. I think it has also given R hope and made him feel closer to us.
- I thought it was a very good idea as my daughter asks for her dad all the time. It was a good opportunity to bond with each other and create valuable moments.
- It’s lovely to see him doing things with his dad, I haven’t seen this in ages!
Fathers’ perspectives

- Fathers’ perspectives on the literacy-oriented family visit were elicited through post-programme interview. Interviews were carried out with 27 men (36.5%)
  - Got to bond with daughter for longer.
  - Storytelling, being creative, drawing and most important connected with me I want to continue bonding more and more with my children.
  - I miss my children, the children need me.
  - I don’t get to spend quality time with my kids due to being in prison; was good connecting time
  - I haven’t had the chance to sit and play with my son ever. That was a great experience for me. Thank you so much.
  - “It’s nice to do things with my child”
Fathers’ perspectives

- Not only did it make me realise how much I am missing out but doing all the different activities with them was so enjoyable and bonding with them and watching them learn some of the activities was important for me as a father. I learnt to spend quality time with them and many of the tools I have learnt will serve me well in the future. I gained a lot from this course and this day.

- Continue growing as a father as I know it is the most important thing I will ever do. I want to continue with all the things I have learnt through Pact. Everything I have learnt and continue to learn will make me a better father, man and partner.

- When I get out of here I’m going home to my family and I’m never coming back here again. My family need me and I need my family.
Next steps

The School of Education and Pact are working together to continue to run FLiP programmes in several prisons for mothers and fathers.

Pact Family workers have worked collaboratively with Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Clough and are fully trained in FLiP work through the University certificated route.
Acknowledgements

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