

Extending the Reach and Improving the Quality of Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy

Family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) to Bilingual families

Executive Summary

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Prepared for the QIA by the Alliance for Lifelong Learning

Introduction

Over the past few years there has been a steady increase in the number of bilingual children in schools and an increasing focus from schools and early years settings on involving parents/carers in their children's education. There is particular frustration at the difficulty of communicating with parents with very low levels of English language skills. Although many local authorities have provided for bilingual families under the family, literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programme, there has been an ambivalence over the extent to which FLLN courses apply to bilingual families and particularly how low-level English language learners can access the concepts and information about children's development and learning inherent in the FLLN programme.

To address some of these issues, in August 2007 the Alliance for Lifelong Learning was commissioned to develop and pilot a range of family language courses as part of a larger piece of work designed to extend the reach and improve the quality of FLLN provision with hard-to-engage groups; this involved trialling models of different length and with different models of children's involvement. These pilot courses would be accompanied by materials to support the models and a training module for FLLN tutors, teachers and managers to develop their skills in working with bilingual families.

In February 2008, a further three pilots (giving a total of nine pilots) were commissioned by the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) to develop models incorporating the development of community cohesion as an additional focus to the traditional FLLN programme.

Government policy and bilingual families

The development of a stronger strand of FLLN with bilingual families is in accordance with government policies and initiatives, which strive to create a fairer, more inclusive society with equal opportunities for all. Poverty is seen as a huge barrier to tackling injustice and inequality. Children from ethnic minorities face a particularly high risk of growing up in poverty: 58% of children from Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin children live in poverty, compared with 19% of white children.

The HM Treasury Review argues that the principle of 'progressive universalism' is not being met in respect of support for all parents, and that, for example, the needs of parents from ethnic minority backgrounds are not currently being met. Progressive universalism requires that:

... those children and families who need it should receive additional support to address the persistent gap in outcomes between the lowest and the highest socio-economic groups. This means offering a continuum of support according to need, with greater personalization of services to meet every child's and family's requirements.

Consultation and participation are two key words in delivering successful outcomes for children and families under Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003). English language and an understanding of systems and expectations are necessary for families to be able to make informed choices about services and activities, and play an active role in their children's learning and development.

The NIACE report, *More Than A Language...* (2006), highlights the importance of family learning in making a powerful contribution to children's educational achievement as well as bringing benefits to whole families and the schools in which their children learn.

It states that family learning provides opportunities for parents to develop their own language skills as well as their ability to help to raise their children's educational achievements and aspirations. This is particularly important for bilingual children because a significant proportion of the large numbers of children from black and minority ethnic families who fail to reach their full potential at school will be from bilingual families.

Pilot models

The pilot models responded to recent changing patterns of immigration by providing for a 12-hour 'welcome to our school' course aimed at newly arrived migrant families at Level 1 and Level 2, to include signposting to further education, training or employment. The other 20-hour, 30-hour, 60-hour and 72-hour models were aimed at Entry level learners from refugee and settled faith communities, as well as spouses and partners of migrant workers. In practice, the 12-hour model was also found to be just as relevant to settled immigrant communities who needed guidance on understanding and engaging with the organisation of children's learning and on how to support it.

The teaching arrangements for the models ranged from a joint planning and staffing model co-staffed by an adult teacher and children's teacher, with joint and separate adult and children time (72-hour and 30-hour), to adult-only taught sessions staffed by an adult tutor, with children's involvement addressed through home activities (12-hour, 20-hour, 30-hour, 60-hour). In all instances the learners were expected to have children in pre-school/early years foundation stage (EYFS) and/or Key Stage 1 (KS1), reflecting the emphasis on early parental involvement with the children's learning and responding to feedback from teachers that, once children progress in their schooling beyond KS1, their proficiency in English may outstrip their parents' English language skills, so that children will gain little if they are then taken out of class to join the parents for a joint session.

The course content in all the pilots focused on developing listening and speaking skills for adults and children; the 72-hour model also incorporated early reading and writing skills. The 30-hour and 72-hour models were linked to the Primary National Strategy Letters and Sounds resources. This was found to be a particularly useful learning resource for parents with Entry 1 skills levels and below as well.

Type and length	Target adults	Target children	Course content
Springboard model 12 hours	Migrant workers at L1 and L2 to brush up language and literacy skills	Adults only but expected to have children in EYFS/KS1/KS2	Through a programme called "Welcome to our school" and covering school policies and procedures, differences in education systems, how to support children etc. It will include a session on progression.
Short course 30 hours	Spouses/partners of migrant workers, refugees and settled-faith communities with skills below Entry 3	Adults only but expected to have pre-school/EYFS/KS1 children	Focus on language for and links to developing listening and speaking skills through the use of the Primary National Strategy Letters and Sounds resources for schools, and include hometime activities and a progression session. It will also explore RARPA, OCN FL and/or Sfl L&S entry qualifications

Type and length	Target adults	Target children	Course content
Short course 30 hours	As above	Pre-school/EYFS/KS1 children	As above
Intensive course 72 hours	All bilingual families with skills below Entry 3	As above	As above plus developing early reading and writing skills and e-learning

Pilot courses were funded at the indicative rate for existing courses of similar length and type in the 2007/08 LSC FLLN menu.

Pilot local authorities were Newham, Buckinghamshire, Wakefield, Stoke-on-Trent, Manchester, Cambridgeshire.

Three additional pilots worked with an added focus of community cohesion with the aims of:

- developing transferable generic skills and opportunities for community involvement
- encouraging community cohesion and integration through the sharing of cultural priorities and information regarding children's learning and development.

The pilots were encouraged to work in partnership with community groups for support with recruitment, negotiation of cultural priorities and dissemination across different communities. Pilot providers were Surrey County Council with Woking Sure Start Children's Centre, Oxfordshire County Council with the Multi-cultural Play Project and Birmingham Churches Together Training.

Evaluations from the pilots: Outcomes

Evaluations from the pilots found that most learners had several children across the pre-school to Year 6 age range and that most of the children were involved in the home activities irrespective of age. Home involvement also extended to the involvement of fathers in some of the families, although the enrolled parent on every pilot was the mother or female carer. This may reflect gender caring and family involvement expectations in different cultures, but it may also be a result of the timing of the sessions, the teaching methodology and the recruitment methods.

Language support was seen as an important part of the pilots where the parents' English language levels were very low. Support generally came through existing school staff or, in the case of one pilot, from a child in Year 6, who had the role of school interpreter. Language support was not necessarily offered throughout the course, only at trigger points, to explain and check concepts or report on children's progress.

The pilots and steering group highlighted the concern amongst providers of adult and children's services about the eligibility of bilingual families to attend FLLN courses. The same eligibility criteria apply as for mainstream English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners as governed by the annual Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Learner Eligibility Guidance for Further Education (FE). These criteria can bar from provision a parent who has been identified as needing an FLLN course to improve basic English and to support her/his child.

The evaluations of the pilots showed that all the models had merit and produced positive outcomes for parents, children and the settings where they took place. Particularly interesting were those pilots where the children were involved through home activities and who were able to evaluate in a more

formal way changes in children's attitudes and achievement as a result of the course. It is clear that there are positive changes even on a short course, and the degree and nature of changes in the children's attitudes and achievement on courses of different length and type merits further research.

Pilots were clear that the funding for family learning should be sufficient for some language support, enrichment activities (which were seen as vital, particularly in terms of generating new experiences and language and fostering community cohesion) and for outreach, recruitment and on-course support.

Those pilots that did not include children in the taught sessions were carefully planned and delivered so that they were not mainstream ESOL by another name. Evaluations showed that the three aims of the FLLN programme were met. Many learners were very ambitious for their own English language learning, but saw this in the context of their children's learning; they were also keen to support them at home and school and get involved with school activities.

Unless parents are confident in English language, they are less likely to participate in any aspect of school life and other activities.

Family learning manager, Newham pilot

The pilots also identified the need for continual professional development (CPD) training, as work with bilingual families expands and specialist Skills for Life (SfL) teachers are asked to extend their work to family language.

Other achievements

The pilots gave staff the chance to develop their own professional skills and to progress personally. The class volunteer who provided bilingual support to a group of Pakistani women on the Birmingham pilot has now gone on to train as a specialist teacher.

I thoroughly enjoyed being part of this project and know that it has been developmental for me professionally. Thank you.

Adult tutor, Surrey

Schools involved reported improved communication with the parents involved on the pilots, which was helping to build confidence and improve relationships between families and the school.

Through the pilots all the providers involved were able to develop new curricula, resources and partnerships for the delivery of FLLN to bilingual families. All providers are using the experiences gained to extend an improved FLLN offer to bilingual families in 2008/09.

Progression

All pilots succeeded in engaging learners in the desire for further learning, which most typically meant the desire to learn more English. Where possible, learners were supported to enrol for community or college ESOL classes. In some areas, however, ESOL courses are oversubscribed or in limited supply for Entry level learners, and this makes progression difficult. Information and guidance sessions helped to inform learners about what further education and training was available.

For some learners, progression is not so straightforward. Provision other than family learning may not have crèche facilities, or funding for crèches may have run out. Cultural and family restrictions may

prevent learners from enrolling for provision other than family learning, which is seen as ‘safe’, particularly for Muslim women.

Pilots reported that ten learners expressed an interest in volunteering in school and one in taking teaching assistant qualifications. From the community cohesion focus pilots, one learner made the link to volunteer within the voluntary group involved in the pilot, and nine learners are planning to take the work from the pilots into the wider community.

Partnership working

As with all FLLN programmes, the pilots showed how all partners needed to be clear about the aims of the course, particularly with new developments such as the pilots with the community cohesion focus.

Partnership proved vital for successful recruitment, on-course support (including bilingual support), signposting for progression, and providing information and advice. Where the pilots were taught by an adult tutor with possibly limited intimate knowledge of the children’s curriculum, better development of school partnerships would have enabled easier linking to the children’s curriculum and school activities.

Partnerships with adult learning and the adult information and advice service led to learners enrolling at the local college (Stoke) and seeking one-to-one interviews and further education and employment (Surrey).

Partners included schools, community groups, the Ethnic Minority Advisory Service, museums, libraries, home school link workers, adult learning (including outreach), adult guidance service and, on one pilot, a school governor.

Pilots identified partnership work as one of the most important success criteria for courses. This partnership work included:

- good teamwork with other professionals, e.g. refugee workers, adult and community learning, home/school link workers
- support with recruitment and retention, including from a bilingual school governor
- active involvement by head teachers and ethnic minority support teams.

Outcomes

All the pilots returned data on the parents. Children on the joint programmes were drawn from EYFS and KS1, and their home languages included Bengali, Ukrainian, Russian, Farsi, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu and Pushto.

Collated results of end of course data:

Age range of adults	100% 19 +
Number of parents/carers enrolled	76
Percentage of female	100%
Percentage of males	0%
Ethnic groups	Polish, Iranian, Lithuanian, Pakistani, Saudi Arabian, Algerian,

	Iraqi, Turkish, Punjabi, Congolese, Bangladeshi, Afghan, Ukrainian	
Entry level learners 95%	Level 1 learners 5%	Level 2 learners 0%
Attendance rate		77% (four courses did not complete this information)
Percentage of parents completing programmes		79%
Percentage taking SfL qualifications		9%
Percentage achieving SfL qualifications		9%
Percentage progressing to further learning/training		66%
Percentage gaining employment		7%

Recruitment numbers were highest where there was good partnership work. Accreditation was offered where providers already had existing systems for offering accreditation on family language courses. Types of employment gained included shop work and distribution. At least eleven learners expressed an interest in volunteering in school. The majority of learners were below Entry and Entry 1, so they needed a better grasp of English before they could get a job.