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Does Introducing Parents to Learning to Learn Techniques have a Positive Effect on Pupils' Achievement?



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◆ PROJECT AIMS

We aimed to discover whether involving parents and introducing them to various Learning to Learn (L2L) approaches will develop their children's self esteem and resilience as learners and so raise standards.

◆ RESEARCH FOCUS

We are looking at the role of family learning in supporting Learning to Learn by arranging a series of evenings to introduce parents to the major Learning to Learn approaches. We will monitor the impact that the parent's involvement has on the confidence and capability of their children.

◆ DIMENSIONS OF THIS CASE STUDY

We are a nursery and infant school with a total of 155 full time pupils plus 38 part-time in the nursery. The invitation to the parents' sessions went to all parents and between 30 and 40 parents attended each of the 12 sessions representing 50 children.

Focus in the 5Rs for Lifelong Learning:

Resilience



Remembering



Resourcefulness



Reflectiveness



Readiness



◆ SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Sharing Learning to Learn approaches with parents raises their own self esteem and confidence as learners.
- Involving parents in Learning to Learn enables them to feel more able to teach and help their own children at home.
- The confidence of the parents communicates itself to the children.
- Even after only a few months improvements have been noticed in some of the children's performance.

CONTEXT

School

The school is a 2 form entry nursery and infant school situated in an area of high unemployment and poverty. It is part of an Education Action Zone (EAZ). Out of the 104 children at Key Stage 1 (Key Stage 1), 20% are on the special needs register and of the 89 Foundation Stage pupils 30% are of concern to the teacher for various reasons. 18% of the children are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) although this figure would be higher if we took into account the number of part time children we have. The catchment area of the school is one where academic aspirations and attainment are traditionally very low.

All year groups including the Nursery are represented in this study as we feel that it is important for parents to become involved in their children's education as soon as they start school.

The school was invited to become part of the project due to its past involvement with educational research and interest in the latest developments in teaching and learning. All teachers have had training in using Assessment for Learning and 4 teachers are involved with Cornwall's research into formative assessment and have travelled to America as part of this.

We believe that our children deserve the best education available and are capable of high achievements and this belief drives our research into the best approaches to use. We have also researched the effect of healthy eating and surroundings on the pupils and a number of changes have been made to the way we approach lunchtimes which has created a lot of interest from other schools.

Teacher(s)

The two teachers leading this research are the Headteacher and the Teaching and

Learning Coordinator who is also a member of the management team. Both have been involved with other research in the past. The Headteacher is keen to drive the school forward and be at the forefront of advances in educational practice. Last year she completed a very successful action research into healthy eating and the lunchtime environment, which has created a lot of interest from other head teachers in the county. She encourages all teachers and teaching assistants to pursue any research they are interested in.

The Teaching and Learning Coordinator has had a long involvement with researching the best approaches to education both within and outside the school system. She has long felt that schools do not always provide the best conditions for optimum learning and strives to discover how to make learning more accessible to all children. She believes that all children have the capability to be gifted and as such has researched into the provision for Gifted and Talented (G&T) children in Foundation and Key Stage 1. She runs a challenge club after school to stretch children further.

Both teachers believe that parents and teachers should work together to provide the best education for the children. They have been heartened to see the response the parents have had to the evenings that have been arranged and are looking forward to a closer working partnership with parents at the end of the research. They are aware of the difficulties of sustaining interest and of keeping up the momentum but feel quite positive about the benefits of this approach.

Pupils

As mentioned before the research includes a cross section from all classes within the school. All parents were sent an invitation and those that have taken part represent 46 pupils, i.e. 24%. We also have four parents from our last year's Year 2 class

whose children are now at the junior school. The research will track how these children perform against their peers. The youngest pupil is three and the oldest eight.

Although all parents involved want the best for their children many have quite low expectations of their academic ability. For the last three years our Key Stage 1 test results have been below the national average. Because the children come from a total of seven different classes the range of learning to learn approaches they encounter is varied. For example, four classes have been involved in Assessment for Learning research and are used to being given learning intentions, success criteria and three of them also regularly self evaluate their work. Two of these classes do a Brain Gym® programme every day. The remaining 3 classes, at present, are aware of these approaches but do not use them regularly.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Rationale

We chose to investigate whether explaining L2L approaches to parents would have a positive impact on their children's learning because we feel that children spend more time under the influence of their families than their teacher.

We feel that much of how a child performs in school has to do with confidence, self esteem and self belief and that for the most part parents have a greater influence in these areas than we do. We felt that people living in this area have low self esteem and aspirations when it comes to academic achievement and that this is reflected in the way their children perform in school.

By turning parents into lifelong learners we are hoping to do the same for their

children. We have arranged for the best speakers we could get in various L2L areas such as Mind Mapping, NLP etc to talk to the parents for approximately an hour a fortnight.

Objectives

We aim to educate parents about the importance of self esteem, self talk and persevering when stuck and to give them strategies to help them and their children become better learners. By so doing we hope to produce children who are resilient and resourceful in their learning and who will go on to become lifelong learners. In the short term we aim for improved performance in school and greater parental involvement and support.

Hypothesis

This project aims to investigate whether involving parents and showing them various L2L approaches will develop children's Readiness and Resilience and so raise standards and develop confident and lifelong learners.

RESEARCH PROCESS

Teachers' Choices

We decided to hold a series of nine sessions for parents. These were held in the school hall every fortnight starting in October and continuing into the Spring Term. We agreed that the best time to hold the meetings was in the evenings so that more people would have a chance of attending and also because some of the speakers were not available during the day. This proved to be a good choice as although some people said that they couldn't attend due to childcare problems most parents managed to find babysitters and in some cases both parents were able to come.

An invitation was sent out to all parents of children in our school and to the parents of

last year's Year 2 who are now in our sister junior school. These children had previously been introduced to a few L2L ideas. We wanted the sessions to be available to as many parents as possible.

An initial invitation was sent out which included a paragraph about our involvement in the Learning to Learn Phase 3 Evaluation. We made it clear that although it was not necessary to attend all sessions we would be keeping a register of parents so that we could see whether regular attendance had more effect than just coming to one or two talks.

We were very encouraged by the very positive response we got and many parents asked if we could perhaps do the sessions again as they were unable to make that particular evening.

We set out to be as welcoming and friendly as possible as many parents still have a hesitant or even negative attitude towards school and teachers. We also aimed to keep each session light hearted and fun, as well as imparting knowledge. At each session we offered tea, coffee and biscuits and there was time for a chat before we started. The sessions lasted for an hour although sometimes overran.

The first session was led by the school's Teaching and Learning Coordinator and provided an overview of L2L. The school purchased a CHAMPS® CD and this was used on an interactive whiteboard to introduce the ideas of brain based learning.

For subsequent sessions we enlisted the help of LEA advisors, advanced skills teachers and independent consultants all of whom were known to be experts in their field and were good speakers.

The topics covered were:

- seeing yourself as a learner, which included self talk and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP);

- three main ways to learn, Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (VAK) and Brain Gym®;
- overcoming barriers to learning by raising self esteem;
- memory skills and techniques to aid memory;
- visual learning including Mind Maps®;
- the different ways of being intelligent, a brief overview of all of the intelligences;
- thinking skills, various ways of promoting thinking e.g. by Odd One Out puzzles, Mysteries, Fortune Lines;
- the importance of talk in particular using a Philosophy For Children approach; and
- formative assessment and reflecting on your own learning.

At the end of each session parents were encouraged to note down anything that they felt they had learnt from that particular session or general comments about how they thought it had gone.

Although we originally planned to have 9 sessions parents requested more, especially in the area of NLP. The teachers involved were very enthusiastic about all of the approaches talked about and as the sessions progressed became increasingly aware of a sense of belonging amongst the parents who attended regularly. Both parents and teachers looked forward to the sessions for the camaraderie as well as the learning opportunities. Everyone came away feeling that they had learnt something worthwhile.

Evidence Collected

The older children of parents who attended these sessions have completed the project questionnaire i.e. those children in Years 1 and 2. The children from the Foundation Stage were considered too young to be able to complete this questionnaire. We did try modifying it for the younger children but found the exercise too time consuming.

Parents were encouraged to make written comments and feedback after each session and also to report on any successes they'd had implementing the L2L techniques which they had learned. At the end of the series of talks parents were issued with a questionnaire to determine how they felt their attendance would benefit their children's learning. Much of our evidence has come from the parents themselves as this research project focused primarily on educating the parents and through them the children.

We have also looked at the children's reading tests and where relevant, SATs results, in order to see if any improvement in performance is discernible at this early stage. As we hope to raise children's confidence in their own learning, class teachers were asked if they could detect any increase in children's self esteem and confidence in their own learning ability.

The Role of Learning to Learn

Obviously the role of L2L has been central in this research project. Each session of the parent evenings have been about different aspects of L2L. We chose those areas which we felt most useful and which are at present the most popular of the L2L techniques. The aspects we chose have been listed previously in this report and on reflection we are pleased with the choice we made as they have given parents a broad and balanced outline of various learning to learn approaches. As the discussion of results will show each approach was put into practice by at least some of the parents. Those that tried the techniques have been very positive about the results and excited by the knowledge that it is possible to learn how to learn.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Findings

From the point of view of getting parents more involved with their children's learning the evenings can be deemed to have been a great success. Not only did we have a quarter of our pupils represented but of those parents who attended 44% attended all nine sessions and 80% attended half or more.

ST MERIADOC C OF E NURSERY AND INFANT SCHOOL



Learning to Learn Parent's Evenings Questionnaire

1. How would you rate your own ability to learn? Please tick one box
 Good Average Poor

2. Has your confidence in your own ability changed since attending this course? Please tick one box
 Increased Stayed the same Decreased

3. Has your confidence in your ability to help your children learn changed since attending this course? Please tick one box
 Increased Stayed the same Decreased

4. Has your attitude towards this school changed since attending this course? Please tick one box
 Yes No

If you answered yes please state in what ways.

5. Do you believe that your child will benefit from your attendance at this course? Please tick one box
 Yes No

Please give reasons for your answers.

6. What do you believe about intelligence? Please tick the statement you agree with most.

We have what we were born with and that can't be changed.

We can increase our intelligence by clever teaching.

We can increase our intelligence by using our brain more.

7. Have your ideas about the above changed since attending this course? Please tick one box
 Yes No

If you answered yes please state in what ways.

8. Do you believe that you can learn anything given the right conditions? Please tick one box
 Yes No

If this course has helped you to confirm your ideas about the above please say how.

9. What do you remember most about the course and where would you like to go from here?

Questionnaire completed by parents

We have collected data from these parents via a questionnaire and feedback session. We received 23 completed questionnaires. Where both parents attended only one questionnaire was completed.

One of our research aims was to discover whether involving parents in L2L approaches would develop their children's self esteem and resilience as learners. It is easier for parents to do this if they themselves have good self esteem. 65% of parents questioned rated their own ability as average before starting the course but all said that their confidence in their own ability had increased after attending the sessions. For example,

I have more confidence in my learning ability and therefore I feel this can only help my child's learning ability.

As a parent it has given me confidence about learning for myself and others.

Before attending this course I felt I could not learn any more than I already knew but by attending this course I feel if I want to learn something I can. Learning is fun!

Even after just the first session one parent reported her realisation that both she and her son were capable of learning anything had had a positive effect on him:

I told him that I know that he can do it even if at present he is finding it hard. He is now asking to do his homework and is delighted to realise

he can do it right. I feel I am building up his self esteem.

We were particularly pleased to note this lady's comment about the child being able to 'do it' even if at the present he is finding it hard as this is fostering the child's resilience, which was one of our initial aims.

It is obviously outside the capability of this research to determine whether children of parents attending this course will gain long lasting learning resilience but given that most educators agree that parental attitudes and input have the most effect on a child then it is fair to assume that introducing L2L techniques to parents of children who are just starting out in their school career will have a beneficial effect on their self belief and performance as learners.

22 out of the 23 parents who filled in the questionnaire believe that their attendance at this course will benefit their child. The one who was unsure had only attended three sessions. Also 92% felt their confidence in their ability to help their child had increased. The remaining 8% already had a high self belief, which had stayed the same:

I have learnt a lot of different ways of learning and by making learning fun my children look forward and are more willing to learn and feel able to talk to me about their school work.

If one form of teaching for your child doesn't work I now know how to find a better way of learning.

YEAR ONE PROJECT 2003/2004

Already after one session it has made a difference – homework is more fun now.

My son is eager to learn and has learnt his spellings in half the time.

We have already used Mind Mapping® to learn left from right. Also we have taught our child (three) many letters of the alphabet. All the techniques we've used have been learnt on this course.

We have learnt how to improve our capabilities – using both sides of the brain, Mind Mapping®, building confidence etc.

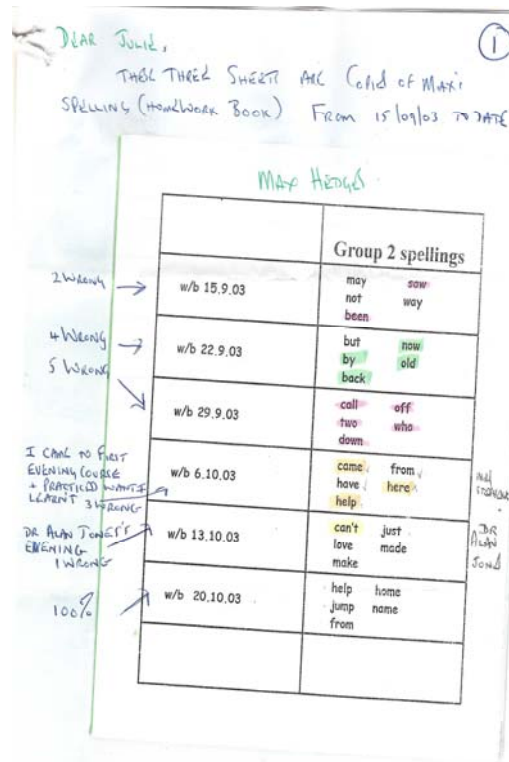
There are many different ways to teach, everyone is different. Learning can and should be fun. Less pressure really helps. Everything is possible, be positive. We can do it! Everyone can!

The above quotations coming from parents in an area of traditionally low self esteem and expectations represents quite a shift in attitude and it is this 'can do' atmosphere at home that in our opinion will ultimately have the greatest effect on raising standards in our school. However this will be difficult to quantify until children have been tracked over a number of years.

We have looked at this year's Key Stage 1 SATS results and can say that out of the children whose parents attended L2L

sessions 66% achieved higher than average grades. However it is of course impossible to draw any conclusions from this as it could be argued that these children would have performed at this level anyway.

What is striking about our school's performance over the last two years is the correlation between the introduction of L2L approaches in Year 2 and also to parents and the rise in our PANDA grades. Last year was the first year we really concentrated on the Learning to Learn approaches of building resilient, independent and confident learners and our average grades rose from E to A in both reading and writing and from D to A* in maths. This year we have also introduced parents to these ideas and although the PANDA report hasn't been completed yet and results still have to be finalised it is clear that we have maintained the higher standards achieved last year.



PTO
 First spelling test a scanned in by a parent to show baseline

On an individual level we can definitely say that involving parents in L2L approaches has led to an increase in standards for some children as seen in example above:

This dad attended all sessions and has been very enthusiastic and appreciative of all of the approaches he has learnt:

I have found the new approach to homework has had an amazing effect – it is fun and we both look forward to it. My child has come on in leaps and bounds and has gained in confidence. Mrs Paige (his teacher) has also found this.

He ended by saying:

M's attitude to homework has totally changed and so has mine – with the help of this course/ speakers/ teaching we all look forward to doing the maths and other work. A calm relaxing atmosphere – the introduction of colour, music and fun when doing homework – limiting the amount of time spent into small chunks has really worked and M's dramatic progress, I believe, is a result of a total change of attitude by my wife and I.

The dad photocopied and highlighted his child's spellings for the term, which shows that the child's progression from getting all spellings wrong to getting them consistently all correct directly correlated to his attendance at the meetings.

2

Group 1 spellings	
10 w/b 08.11.03	oil ✓ boil ✓ coin ✓ join ✓
17 w/b 10.11.03	acted ✓ rested ✓ landed ✓ tested ✓
24 w/b 17.11.03	fixed ✓ mixed ✓ mixed ✓ missed ✓
1 w/b 01.12.03	son ✓ won ✓ ton ✓ some ✓
8 w/b 08.12.03	day ✓ say ✓ play ✓ away ✓

could continue various speakers.
only 1 variation in next 6 weeks

Second spelling example, showing improvement over 6 weeks

3

Group 2 spellings	
w/b 05.01.04	place ✓ chance ✓ space ✓ voice ✓ dance ✓
w/b 12.01.04	blew ✓ drew ✓ chew ✓ glue ✓ true ✓
w/b 19.01.04	phone ✓ graph ✓ photo ✓ dolphin ✓
w/b 26.01.04	war ✓ dwarf ✓ warm ✓ swarm ✓ warn ✓
w/b 02.02.04	oar ✓ board ✓ roar ✓ roared ✓ soar ✓
w/b 09.02.04	four ✓ caught ✓ pour ✓ taught ✓ your ✓

WHAT HAPPENED HERE
MAX WAS UNWELL
HAD THREE DAYS
OFF SICK -
SO HIS MUM & DAD
PRACTICE HIS
STATE OF MIND

Back on Track

CONCLUSION

MAX'S ATTITUDE TO HOMEWORK HAS TOTALLY CHANGED
SO HIS MIND - WITH THE HELP OF THE COURSE/SPEAKER TEACHING
WE ALL LOOK FORWARD TO DOING THE MATHS AND OTHER
WORK. A CALM RELAXING ATMOSPHERE - THE INTRODUCTION OF
COLOUR, MUSIC + FUN WHEN DOING HOMEWORK - LIMITING THE
AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT INTO SMALL CHUNKS (SEE OVERLEAF)

Third example of child's spellings showing attainment after parents had attended all meetings

CONCLUSION

Developing this Approach

We would definitely run this programme again as both staff and parents involved felt that they gained a lot of benefit from it. One of the drawbacks was the time commitment on the part of the teachers as the best time was felt to be after school and certainly this did stop us from putting on more sessions in the Summer Term, which was very busy. Also the evenings took a considerable amount of time to organise and coordinate.

A possible way around this would be perhaps for a couple of schools to work together and so share the load. This would also perhaps help with problems of availability of speakers. We really felt that top quality speakers who were experts in their field helped to make the evenings more of a success.

This term we have been able to tell our parents about daytime sessions that are being held in our local secondary school, which follow on from what we have been doing. We feel that greater collaboration between schools in this way will benefit not only the schools but also the parents and their children.

Summary

To summarise this has been a very successful project, which has been well received by our parents. The members of staff involved have also greatly enjoyed taking part and feel that not only have they learnt more about 'Learning to Learn' but also now have a closer relationship with our parents. For us the most important outcomes are as follows:

- stronger links with parents who now feel more involved in their child's learning;
- an increase in self esteem and confidence amongst parents which is being passed on to the children;

- in some cases we can already see an improvement in the child's performance in school.

Although at the moment it is too early to say, we have high hopes that a continuation of this approach in our school will result in children who leave us well on the road to being confident and capable lifelong learners.

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