



Fathers Reading Every Day: an outcome evaluation

Introduction

Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) is a 4-week, home-based 'reading for pleasure' programme run by early years' settings and primary schools.

The programme originated in the US and was developed by Dr Stephen Green, Associate Professor and Extension Child Development Specialist with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. It has been run for 10 years there, reaching around 20,000 fathers and their children.

During the FRED programme, fathers and father-figures of children enrolled in early childhood programmes and primary schools are challenged to read to their children for 15 minutes per day for two weeks, followed by 30 minutes per day for another two weeks. Fathers receive supporting materials to help them meet the challenge effectively, and at the end of the programme there is a closing party to celebrate the reading they have done.

Between 2011 and 2013 the Fatherhood Institute piloted FRED in ten schools in London and Salford. An independent evaluation found impressive results: the 300 participating children were over four times more likely to improve their reading levels above expectation than non-participating children. FRED improved children's communication skills, vocabulary, confidence and numeracy. High numbers of boys participated, and made up over 60% of the cohort.

In 2013 -2015 the Institute received a National Prospectus grant from the Department for Education, to pilot the FRED programme with 2,000 children in early years settings and primary school reception classes in four local authority areas: Lambeth, Southwark, York and Leicester. This report provides information on our in-house evaluation of this pilot.

The intervention

As described above, FRED is a home-based 'reading for pleasure' programme. Settings hold a launch event, at which fathers are invited to enrol onto the FRED programme, by filling in a simple registration form. Participating fathers receive printed resources designed to help them understand the importance of their reading to their children, and to feel confident as readers, along with a logbook to record the reading they do with their children over the month of the programme. They are challenged to read to their children for fifteen minutes per day for two weeks followed by 30 minutes per day for two weeks. At the end of the programme, settings hold a closing party, to which fathers are invited as a celebration of the reading done. Logbooks are collected and fathers are invited to fill in an exit form.

The Fatherhood Institute trained a total of 301 staff in a range of settings including primary schools and children's centres: 96 in Lambeth, 71 in Southwark, 101 in Leicester and 33 in York. Training was provided in a variety of formats, according to local need; this included courses delivered over 1 or 2 days, sometimes in twilight sessions.

The training consisted of two elements: sessions designed to highlight and improve participants' understanding of fathers' importance to children's learning and development, and to present strategies for successfully engaging with fathers and creating father-inclusive services; and sessions focused on delivery of the FRED programme itself.

Settings were asked to collect and share data from participating fathers via registration forms filled in by fathers at the start of the intervention, and via logbooks and exit forms completed at the end of the intervention. Overall, settings collected data relating to 714 children. Our evaluation focuses on a sub-sample of 124 children at Foundation Stage 2 in Lambeth and York, for whom we were able to obtain local authority data, to use for comparative purposes.

Methodology

Our evaluation consisted of a small scale quantitative study of a sample of 124 children at Foundation Stage 2 level in Lambeth and York, whose fathers had signed up to take part in FRED in one of the 16 participating settings.

The data used for the evaluation was gathered from early years settings using pre-existing measures, relating to four of the 17 aspects of school readiness identified in the EYFS framework. To avoid researcher bias, assessments and attainment judgements were made by experienced early years practitioners at each setting, all robustly regulated to national standards by Ofsted.

The evaluation included children who participated in FRED cycles which took place between the autumn term of 2013 and the spring term of 2014.

Evaluation measures

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework supports an integrated approach to early learning and care. It gives all professionals a set of common principles and commitments to deliver quality early education and childcare experiences to all children.

The EYFS framework measures attainment in relation to age-related expectations which are described in more detail in the 'Development Matters' learning and development scales, banded by age group as follows: 16-26 months, 22-36 months, 30-50 months and 40-60+ months.

For the purposes of this evaluation, assessment judgements were extracted from settings records for children from the sample group. The evaluation focused on four of the 17 aspects of development of the EYFS, as follows:

- Reading – Literacy
- Listening and Attention
- Managing Feelings and Behaviour, and
- Making Relationships.

Settings recorded judgements for developmental aspects related to the four different age range bands, assessing each child according to three descriptions:

- Emerging – The 'emerging' judgement means that the child is working towards the 'expected' level of attainment for the end of reception.
- Expected – The 'expected' judgement means the child has demonstrated all, or almost all, of the parts of an early learning goal.

- Exceeding – The ‘exceeding’ judgement means that the child is independently and consistently working beyond the ‘expected’ level of development. This judgement for many of the early learning goals is very challenging.

Selection of the comparison group

We chose our comparison group based on assessments for FS2, primarily because local authorities only have a statutory requirement to collect and share FS2 data and not for the children in other age ranges. The local authority comparison data relates to the 2012-2013 academic year, to avoid the possibility of it being contaminated by the FRED intervention group.

We selected our comparison group in the knowledge that perfect comparisons would be difficult, due to the wide range of external factors affecting children’s progress, such as different social and economic backgrounds, and different teachers. Matching the comparison and intervention group in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc was beyond the scope and resource of this evaluation.

Results

For each of the four outcome measures we report, in Tables 1 to 4 (see page 6), the numbers and percentage of children who exceeded or achieved expected attainment for the FS2 children in the FRED cohort in Lambeth and York; in the comparison group (FS2 data local authority averages for Lambeth and York, obtained from local authorities); and nationally (FS2 national averages, obtained from national government via www.gov.uk). We also break the figures down by gender.

On each measure, more than 90% of the FRED children exceeded or achieved expected attainment.

The children in the FRED cohort outperformed the comparison (LA average) cohort, and the national averages, on all four outcome measures (see Tables 1 to 4).

Gender differences were minimal across all four measures for the FRED cohort, in stark contrast to the comparison cohort and national average, where girls outperformed boys by a significant margin.

Indeed, for two of the measures, boys in the FRED cohort outperformed girls (see Table 4: 94.12% for boys and 93.15% for girls on Making Relationships; see Table 1: 91.67% for boys and 91.43% for girls for Reading – Literacy).

The difference between the performance of boys in the FRED cohort and those in the local authority comparison group was dramatic for all four measures. Boys in the FRED cohort outperformed boys in the local authority cohort by a margin of 54% on the Reading-Literacy measure (see Table 1: 91.67% compared to 59.5%); by a margin of 25.4% for Managing Feelings and Behaviour (see Table 3: 92.15% compared to 73.5%); by a margin of 22.7% for Listening and Attention (see Table 2: 90.2% compared to 73.5%); and by a margin of 19.9% for Making Relationships (see Table 4: 94.12% compared to 78.5%).

Table 1. Reading – literacy

| % achieving/ exceeding expected progress | FRED cohort | Local authority average | National average ¹ |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Boys | 91.67 (n=44/48) | 59.5 | 65 |
| Girls | 91.43 (n=64/70) | 73.5 | 73 |

Table 2. Listening and attention

| % achieving/ exceeding expected progress | FRED cohort | Local authority average | National average |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Boys | 90.2 (n=46/51) | 73.5 | 74 |
| Girls | 93.15 (n=68/73) | 84 | 86 |

Table 3. Managing feelings and behaviour

| % achieving/ exceeding expected progress | FRED cohort | Local authority average | National average |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Boys | 92.15 (n=47/51) | 73.5 | 77 |
| Girls | 93.15 (n=68/73) | 87.5 | 89 |

Table 4. Making relationships

| % achieving/ exceeding expected progress | FRED cohort | Local authority average | National average |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Boys | 94.12 (n=48/51) | 78.5 | 80 |
| Girls | 93.15 (n=68/73) | 88.5 | 90 |

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¹ National figures obtained from *Tables A to D and 3 to 9: EYFSP assessment outcomes, SFR39/2014*. Available online from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2013-to-2014>. Accessed 29 June 2015.