

Booktime 2007-08

Evaluation Final Report



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Background

Booktime is a programme set up by education and publishing company Pearson, in association with independent charity Booktrust, to promote the pleasure of reading and encourage parents and carers to read aloud with their children.

The programme was originally piloted in Warwickshire and the London Borough of Southwark in January 2006. Following positive feedback, the programme was scaled out to targeted regions across the UK in October 2006.

In January 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) offered to support the expansion of Booktime, enabling every reception aged child in England to receive a book pack. These packs were delivered to schools in partnership with local authorities and library services during the autumn term in 2007. The aim was to give children aged 4 to 5 the gift of an illustrated book (*Funnybones*, by Allan and Janet Ahlberg) shortly after they started school, to take home to share with family and friends. The books were to be handed out by teachers in a special book bag, along with a guidance booklet for parents and carers on shared reading with their children. In addition, participating schools and libraries in England were given a resource pack to facilitate the children's enjoyment of the book, containing items such as stickers, badges, and a poster as well as an activity and session ideas booklet.

The evaluation

An evaluation of the Booktime 2007-08 programme was begun in September 2007 and commissioned to produce a final report in the summer of 2008. The aims of this evaluation were:

1. to evaluate the impact that the Booktime project has had on:
 - the time children spend reading with their families;
 - participating children's reading achievement;
 - their views about, and enjoyment of, reading;
 - the views of their parents/carers about helping their children with reading;
2. to evaluate the Booktime project materials in terms of their:
 - appropriateness for home and use in classrooms and libraries;
 - design and usability;
 - stimulus to young children's reading.

A number of activities were carried out to gather evidence relating to the above questions.

a) Focus groups

Nine focus group interviews were carried out in schools in November/December, 2007. These included groups of teachers, parents/carers, and librarians, in each of the following Local Authorities – Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. The three Local Authorities we worked in represented a good range in that one was largely rural in nature, one inner city and one largely suburban. They also contained a mix in terms of ethnic origins, first language, and social class.

b) Parent/carer interviews

Twenty five parents/carers whose children had received Booktime book packs were interviewed in their homes during January and February, 2008. During each interview, we were also able, briefly, to talk to the participating child, although always in the presence of at least one of their parents/carers. Largely for logistical and cost reasons, twenty four of the parents/carers involved in this sample were resident in the Warwickshire / Coventry / Solihull areas, their children attending schools who were members of the University of Warwick teacher training partnership. One parent resident in Scotland was included in the sample, following her participation in market research the previous summer with parents/carers of suitably aged children.

c) Teacher questionnaire survey

A questionnaire was administered by email in December 2007 to a randomly-selected sample of teachers in 1,239 schools participating in Booktime across the country. The aim of this questionnaire was to establish the views of teachers about the Booktime materials and the impact of these materials upon the children's attitudes towards reading. Email and telephone reminders were made in January 2008. We received 465 completed responses to this questionnaire.

d) Other evaluation evidence

In addition to the evidence collected by staff of the University of Warwick, Hope-Stone Research were also commissioned to survey reactions to the Booktime programme and materials. Their activities included:

A local authority and library service questionnaire survey:

79 of the 174 participating library services and local authorities completed a self completion questionnaire, sent by email in December 2007, and returned during December 2007 and January 2008. The aim was to obtain views about the logistics, materials, and the value of being involved in the programme at the local level.

A general parent/carer questionnaire survey:

Parent/carer questionnaires were distributed during March 2008 through approximately 340 randomly selected schools participating in Booktime. 1,409 questionnaires were returned from 132 schools between March and May 2008. The aim was to supplement the qualitative information from the parent/carer interviews with statistically robust data from a larger cohort across the country.

Key findings arising from these surveys will be mentioned briefly in the current report.

A summary of findings

Summaries of the main findings of each element of the evaluation will be presented at the beginning of this report. Further detail of these findings will be found later in the report, in separate sections.

1. Focus groups - Summary

The main evaluative points coming out of this part of the Booktime evaluation were:

The Booktime bag and its contents

- There was a unanimously positive initial reaction in the groups to the bag and the book contained therein.
- Some participants did suggest that this was not the first time the children they were linked with would have seen this particular book. Future Booktime projects might involve a book that was not quite so universally used already.

Children's reactions to the bag and the book

- Again, the comments of parents and teachers about children's reactions were very positive. Much of the children's delight at receiving the material, however, was attributed to the bag rather than the book!
- Perhaps the desirability of the bag will rub off on children's feelings towards the book within?
- If teachers knew beforehand what they would be getting in the Booktime pack, this would enable them to plan how they might use it to best effect.
- In mixed age classes of Reception and Year 1 children the Booktime packs had caused them a problem in that they had to distribute the bags only to their Reception children, which they felt was rather unfair to the Year 1 children.

Ways in which the book has been used

- The principal use of the book was reading it to and with children.
- There were several mentions by teachers of using the book to spark off follow up activities but none claimed to have used it for more deliberate teaching purposes.

The "Reading with your child" leaflet

- Reactions to this were mixed.
- Some parents thought that the leaflet did not tell them as much as they wanted it to.
- Teachers and librarians were also slightly disappointed with it.
- Many schools already have materials that they use with parents for guidance in reading with young children. A nationally produced leaflet cannot offer the level of detail that individual school leaflets will.
- Perhaps a simple, single page, more cheaply produced leaflet would suffice and the suggestion made to schools that they add their own parental guidance leaflets to the Booktime packs before distributing them.

The Funnybones resource pack including distributables (stickers, bookmarks etc.)

- There were some very positive views expressed about the contents of the resource pack, although not all the teachers said they had actually used these resources as yet.
- The stickers were definitely the most popular item in the packs.
- Other item such as the badges and bookmarks were less often mentioned.
- Our impression is that the contents of the resource pack were generally perceived as gimmicks by the teachers.

The activity sheets and session ideas booklet

- The teachers particularly were fulsome in their praise of the activity booklet.
- Most had found a use for at least one activity/idea from the book.
- There were several suggestions, however, for improvements which could be made.
- More photocopiable pages would have been popular.
- An even more common request was for the material in the activity booklet to be reproduced electronically on the CD accompanying the pack.
- We wonder whether it would be possible next year to put a great deal of the supporting material on a specially produced memory stick?

Other materials

- Teachers and librarians were non-committal about other materials in the Booktime pack.
- They were negative about the CD, seeing little point to having this in the materials.
- They would have appreciated the CD containing texts and activities to help them use the *Funnybones* book in their class teaching.

The future (likely longer term impact of Booktime)

- There was very little disagreement across the focus groups with the idea that Booktime would help children make a really good start in reading.
- The teachers and librarians were quite enthusiastic about the possibility of a Booktime initiative targeted at Year 3 and 4 children (especially boys).

2. Parent/carer interviews – Summary

The main evaluative points coming out of this part of the Booktime evaluation were:

a) The Booktime bag and its contents

- There was unanimous appreciation of the gift their children had received.
- The majority of parents/carers made positive comments about the quality of the book.
- A few parents/carers - of boys - suggested their children would have preferred a non-fiction book.
- A small number had some doubts about its suitability and whether it was too frightening.
- For a few, the attraction of the Booktime pack appeared to rest not so much on its contents but on its cost.

b) Children's reactions to the bag and the book (reported by parents/carers)

- A large majority of the parents/carers reported a very positive reaction to the Booktime pack on the part of their children.
- The reactions of the remainder were not negative but rather non-committal.
- Inevitably, reactions to the bag were as positive as reactions to the book.
- In a lot of the homes there was evidence that the bag was still a treasured item.

c) Children's reactions to the Booktime pack (reported by children)

- All of the children interviewed could remember the Booktime book they had received.
- Only a few needed prompting.
- The impact of the book and its bag had been very high on these children.
- There were no negative reactions to the book at all.
- A large majority of the children could tell us about bits in the book that they liked.
- The rest were able to show us a bit they liked.
- About a third of the children could read aloud to us from the book with good expression and understanding.
- A further third could point to illustrations in the book with obvious signs of enjoyment.
- The vast majority of the group could produce the bag in which they received the book, and they were all actively using the bag for a range of purposes.

d) Ways in which the book had been used

- A range of ways of using the book were reported, including:
 - Parent/carer reading the book to the child;
 - Parent/carer and child talking about the pictures in the book;
 - child drawing his/her own pictures of the book characters;
 - child retelling story to the parent/carer;
 - parent/carer asking child to read the book to her/him;
 - parent/carer and child taking turns to read parts of the book;
 - parent/carer talking about individual words in the story with child;
 - child and parent/carer acting out parts of the story.

- None of the parents/carers had used the book to teach sounds and letters to their children.

e) The “Reading with your child” leaflet

- Reactions to the reading leaflet were mixed.
- Some parents/carers appreciated the presence of such a leaflet.
- Many more, however, expressed disappointment with the leaflet.
- For several it was not sufficiently specific about how to help their children with reading.
- For a few, the leaflet was disappointing because they had already had better advice from their children’s schools.

f) The impact of the Booktime pack on children’s reading

- The vast majority of parents answered “Yes” to the question, “Would you say the Booktime pack has helped your child in beginning reading?”
- When asked to explain their reasons for this answer, they gave a number of responses.
 - My child asks me to read to him/her more often than before
 - My child is a lot keener about books that he/she was
 - My child talks about books more than before
 - My child has brought books home from school to read
 - My child has read aloud to me from Funnybones
 - My child has asked for books as presents

g) The future and likely longer term impact of Booktime

- Two thirds of the parents thought Booktime should carry on because their younger children would also have the experience of receiving a book pack.
- Some of this group also thought Booktime had highlighted the enjoyment of books among all the other things children could do.
- A smaller number suggested other reasons why the scheme should continue.
- Only a few had negative views about the future of Booktime and these were pretty mild.
- Very few, however, thought that the impact of Booktime would be a long term one.
- Most recognised that it would need sustained activity to make a significant change in long term behaviour.

3. Teacher questionnaire survey – Summary

The main evaluative points coming out of this part of the Booktime evaluation were:

The logistical features of the Booktime project

- There was a largely positive response to the organisation of the project.
- Some schools were disappointed, however, with the numbers of packs they received, and with the period of notice they had before the receipt of such packs. There was a strong feeling, expressed in the answers to several questions in this questionnaire and in comments made by members of the focus groups, that, in order to have the maximum impact, schools needed more notice of what they would be receiving as part of Booktime so they could build these materials into their schemes of work and lesson planning.

Pupils' enjoyment of the contents of the Booktime packs

- There had been a very positive reception of the Booktime pack by pupils, with the book itself being almost universally welcomed.
- A few teachers (very few) felt concerned about the unsuitability of the Funnybones book for the children they were teaching. This seems to have led to them not using the book, rather than to any expressions of dislike from their pupils.

Teachers' use of the Funnybones book, and the accompanying resource materials, with their classes

- The vast majority of teachers had used the book with their classes, reporting almost universally that their pupils had enjoyed the reading.
- Where teachers had not used the book, the most common response was that they planned to in the future.
- Of the accompanying materials, the big book had been positively received but other items, such as the phonics wall frieze and the CD-Rom, were less well thought of.
- There had been less use made of the activity materials supplied in the Booktime pack, although this did not seem to have been the result (for most teachers) of any dissatisfaction with these materials. Rather, lack of use was attributed to the fact that the detailed planning for that term's work had already been done and so the activities could not be used to the extent they would have liked.

Teachers' general views of the Booktime programme

- There was almost universal support for the programme from the teachers responding to this questionnaire.
- Some teachers thought that the logistics of Booktime could be improved, especially in terms of the prior notice they were given of the scheme.
- Some teachers suggested improvements to the scheme, including the injection of an EAL element and the provision of electronic resources to accompany the paper-based materials they had been given.

4. Other evaluation evidence – Summary

A. Local authority and library service questionnaire survey

- Most respondents (90%) were happy to support the programme in the way they were asked and virtually all felt its aims were clearly communicated.
- While 72% of respondents thought delivery to schools via the LA's central distribution point was appropriate, 23% were unhappy with this arrangement. Their disquiet centred on concerns over the timing, cost and notice given.
- There was a very high level of satisfaction with the suitability and quality of the Booktime materials and resources. Particularly appreciated were those aimed at children, such as bookmarks, stickers, etc. Where improvements were suggested, the most common request was the provision of more such resources.
- There was almost universal agreement that Booktime had helped support and enhance the work that libraries were currently doing to promote reading for pleasure and family engagement. In addition, most (86%) felt that Booktime was helping to create or build on existing links between local authorities, library services, schools and families.
- Many respondents (65%) were not aware of schools inviting parents and carers to linked activities and events and only 27% were certain this had happened.
- Several improvements were suggested for the Booktime programme. These reflected many of the concerns around resource materials and the delivery process, and there were, for example, suggestions about longer lead in times and an alternative to the autumn launch. Other suggested improvements were funding for delivery, better labelling and greater involvement of the library service, for example, through seminars and other publicity activities, alongside greater publicity for the scheme as a whole.

B. Parent/carer questionnaire survey

- Most parents and carers claimed to read to their reception-aged child at least weekly, and over two thirds claimed to do so daily.
- Mothers were more likely to be frequent readers with their child although in nearly a third of households it was the father who overall claimed to read the most with their child.
- Story books were the most popular reading material. It was claimed, however, that girls had a preference for nursery rhymes and fairy tales whereas boys preferred fact books.
- While 60% of respondents claimed their child had a library card, only 38% said they visited the library with their child monthly, and only 8% weekly.
- A large majority of respondents (87%) said that they had read *Funnybones* with their child, although only 70% said that they had received the Booktime pack.
- Both parents/carers and children seemed to have enjoyed the book – three quarters of parents/carers enjoyed reading it very much, and virtually all said their child enjoyed listening to it.
- Most respondents (83%) who had read *Funnybones* with their child said they would be likely to read another book in the series.
- 16% of parents/carers said they would read more with their child as a result of the Booktime programme. This response was higher among fathers and among those who currently did not read to their child on a daily basis.

Main findings

The key findings of this evaluation are presented below. Each of these findings has been selected for inclusion in this summary list because it came from more than one of the evidence sources involved in the evaluation. The evidence source for a particular claim is given in parentheses against each claim using the following code:

- F – derived from the focus group interviews;
- I – derived from the parent/carer interviews;
- T – derived from the teacher questionnaires;
- P – derived from the parent/carer questionnaires.

- There was an almost unanimous positive reaction to the Booktime pack (bag and book) among teachers, parents/carers and children (F, I, T, P). There is no doubting the delight with which these packs were generally received and many positive comments were made by all stakeholders.
- Some of this positive reaction must, however, be attributed to the Booktime bag rather than the book it contained (F, I, P), although it is quite possible that children's attraction to the bag might well transfer to their feelings about the book inside!
- The book itself was valued highly by the vast majority of stakeholders (F, I, T, P).
- A small minority of stakeholders had some concerns about the appropriateness of the book (I, T), with some expressing worries about it being too scary, not the right genre, or too difficult.
- A variety of uses had been made of the book (F, I, T, P). These included reading it to children; talking about the pictures and/or the story; children reading or retelling the story to an adult; children acting out parts of the story.
- Neither teachers nor parents/carers seem to have used the book for more deliberate teaching purposes, for example, teaching letters and sounds (F, I).
- There were some positive views expressed about the contents of the Funnybones resource pack, although some stakeholders (teachers and librarians) were rather more non-committal about these (F, T, P).
- The CD-Rom, in particular, was negatively received (F, T) with several people commenting that this was a wasted resource.
- Teachers were generally full of praise for the activities in the activity booklet (F, T), although there had been rather less use of these than might have been expected.
- Reactions to the "Reading with your child" booklet were mixed (F, I), but generally it was thought not sufficiently detailed to be really useful.
- Negative comments about the Booktime programme generally tended to be confined to logistical issues (F, T, P). During the start-up of a major national scheme such as this, it is almost inevitable that things will sometimes go wrong, so comments from teachers that they did not receive sufficient packs for their children, or that they did not receive the support materials, might have been expected. There is an intrinsic problem around obtaining accurate pupil intake figures by school year, but greater accuracy might be expected in future as data improves with experience and records of orders, etc.
- One issue which might repay attention, though, is the amount of prior notice that schools are given of the arrival of the Booktime materials (F, T, P). This needs to

be sufficient to allow for teachers to plan these materials into their classroom work. For a number of schools this year, the opportunities offered by the Booktime materials were not taken up because of this planning issue.

- There was strong support for the continuation of the Booktime scheme into future years (F, I, T, P).
- A number of suggestions for improvements in the scheme were made (F, I, T, P), including the following:
 - Consider providing the teaching resources electronically (memory sticks, CD-Roms, web pages);
 - Think about designing specific electronic resources (e.g. for interactive whiteboards);
 - Consider providing non-fiction books as well as story books (might attract the boys specifically);
 - Think about ways of injecting an EAL element into the scheme;
 - Provide longer lead-in time, and more prior notice, before delivery of the materials to schools;
 - Accompany the scheme with enhanced publicity aimed at schools, libraries and parents/carers.

The final point concerns a tentative answer to the key question – did Booktime make a difference to children's reading?

It should be noted that the design of this evaluation of the project does not allow us to give a categorical answer to this question. To provide such an answer would have required a controlled experiment, with before and after measures. Booktime was not set up with the principal aim of affecting children's reading progress, nor was the evaluation intended to measure changes in this. The evidence we were able to collect was all self-report once the book packs had been received. Therefore, we have no objective measures of the attitudinal changes towards books and reading made by the children involved in Booktime, but subjective impressions of such changes from their parents/carers and teachers. Although by its nature such evidence is intrinsically weaker than objective measures would have been, its main strength, in the event, is that it is internally consistent.

Later in this report we provide evidence that all the stakeholders in this programme – parents/carers, teachers, librarians and children themselves - were virtually unanimous in their conviction that the experience of Booktime had enhanced both the enjoyment of and the achievement in reading of the children involved. The most significant outcome is, we believe from the evidence available to us, that the children experiencing Booktime had been positively involved with books in a way that will have a longer term impact upon their approaches to reading.

Detailed Findings

A. Focus group findings

1. The Use of Focus Groups

In this evaluation, focus groups were used as a method for gathering qualitative data related to the views of a variety of stakeholders about the Booktime materials and procedures. A focus group approach has the potential to gather large amounts of very rich and dynamic data (Barbour 1999), although, because they involve group discussion, it should always be borne in mind that collective expressions of ideas may not represent the ideas of individuals within each group. There is a need, therefore, to compare the data arising from these focus group meetings with that gathered in other, more individual ways (questionnaire and interview in this project).

2. Participants

The targeted participants for the focus groups used in this evaluation were selected from Reception/Foundation class teachers in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull, parents of reception class children in each of these three Local Authorities, and personnel from the Schools Library Service in each of the three LAs. Following the advice of Krueger (1994) that the participants in focus groups are normally selected “because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group”, participants in this case were selected because they had had some contact (professional or personal) with the Booktime programme.

The participants were all volunteers. In the case of the teachers and parents/carers, we were given a list of suggested names by the head teachers of primary schools in the University of Warwick Primary Teacher Training Partnership. This original list consisted of 25 teachers and 23 parents/carers. All of these were approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in the focus group sessions. A few declined (for a variety of reasons but mostly to do with time commitments), resulting in a final sample of 22 teachers and 19 parents/carers.

In the case of the school library personnel, we approached the directors of the Schools Library Services (or equivalent) in each of the three LAs and asked for suggestions of personnel who would have had some contact with and knowledge of reception class children in their localities. A list of 21 names was obtained and these people approached. 19 of them agreed to participate in the focus group sessions.

The key issue to bear in mind here is that all the focus group participants were volunteers, which carries the implication that all of them felt they had something they could and wished to contribute to a discussion about Booktime. They could have had strongly positive, or strongly negative, feelings about the programme, but they were unlikely to have had no opinions at all. This must be borne in mind when interpreting the discussions arising in the focus group sessions.

Nine focus group meetings were conducted during November and December 2007. The details of these are as follows:

1. Warwickshire
 - one group of 7 Reception class teachers from four schools in Nuneaton and Bedworth (north of the county);
 - one group of 6 parents/carers of reception class children from two schools in Nuneaton;
 - one group of 7 school library personnel from the Schools Library Service.
2. Coventry
 - one group of 8 Reception class teachers from five schools in the city;
 - one group of 7 parents/carers of reception class children from two schools in the city;
 - one group of 6 school library personnel from the Schools Library Service.
3. Solihull
 - one group of 7 Reception class teachers from four schools from across the authority;
 - one group of 6 parents/carers of reception class children from two schools in North Solihull;
 - one group of 6 school library personnel from the Learning Resources and Advice Service.

3. Discussion topics

As Litoseliti (2003) points out: "Focus groups are intended for gaining information and listening to people's views in a non-threatening environment – not to teach, inform, make a decision or resolve conflict". This has strong implications for the conduct of focus group sessions, which we tried to follow. For example:

- Each session was conducted in as non-threatening an environment as possible (usually school classrooms) and tea/coffee/biscuits were served before the session started, and social 'chat' encouraged as participants got to know each other.
- Each session was begun with a statement that we were enquiring into the Booktime programme and how it was working, and we were interested in participants' views about this.
- We introduced ourselves as being from the University and conducting an evaluation of the Booktime programme. We stressed that we had no involvement with it other than that.
- Our main role was to listen to what participants had to say, intervening only to move the conversation on to a different topic when it seemed to be flagging. Actually in none of the nine sessions were participants ever at a loss for things to talk about! We had scheduled each session to last for one hour, but in the event each one overran by up to 30 minutes.

Discussions focused on a number of topics, each of which was introduced by ourselves in as neutral a way as possible. For example, for the first topic we simply said, 'Well, you've all seen the Booktime bag and its contents. What do you think about this?'

The topics introduced to the groups were as follows:

(N.B. Some topics were more relevant to different focus groups. Where a topic was deemed not appropriate to a particular group, it was not explicitly introduced. The groups which discussed each topic are indicated in the list below by the code T = Reception class teachers; P = Parents; L = Library personnel)

- The Booktime bag and its contents TPL
- Children's reactions to the bag and the book TP
- Ways in which the book has been used TP
- The "Reading with your child" leaflet TPL
- The Funnybones resource pack including distributables (stickers, bookmarks etc.) TL
- The activity sheets and session ideas booklet TL
- Other materials (including the poster, the phonics wall frieze and the CD video) TL
- The future (likely longer term impact of Booktime) TPL

4. Group Reactions

In the following sections, we attempt to report the general flavour of the groups' discussion about each of the topics. Our point earlier should be borne in mind: these are group responses and we cannot really tell if they were shared by each individual taking part. The issues we report, however, were almost all greeted in the groups with a general show of agreement (head nodding, supportive comments such as 'Yes', 'That's right' etc.) Where this was not the case, we will indicate this in our report.

The Booktime bag and its contents

There was a unanimously positive initial reaction in the groups to the bag and the book contained therein. The following quotes were typical:

Funnybones has always been one of my favourite books to use with children. It's brilliant they each have their own copy. (Teacher)

Of course, the scheme is onto a winner when you choose this book. Anything by the Ahlbergs is brilliant. (Librarian)

I remember reading that book when I was at school. I loved it and Kaylie thought it was fantastic. (Parent)

As the discussion progressed, some participants did suggest that this was not the first time the children they were linked with would have seen this particular book. As one parent said:

Well, Liam does already have that book at home, but he was still thrilled by getting it in the bag.

Several of the teachers said that *Funnybones* was already in their classrooms and suggested (gently) that in future, Booktime might provide a book that was not quite

so universally used already. Interestingly though, in two of the librarian focus groups it was claimed that the fact this was a familiar book was a strength of the scheme as local libraries were likely to have copies of the book on their shelves, which would encourage children to make links between home, school and the library.

This final comment notwithstanding, it does seem that one of the things for the Booktime team to consider in any repeat of the programme would be the actual book to be distributed. Ideally, as one teacher suggested, this would be a book that will become a classic but has not yet 'made it'! (Of course, any publisher would be delighted to be able unerringly to spot books like that!)

Children's reactions to the bag and the book

Again, the comments of parents/carers and teachers about children's reactions were very positive. Much of the children's delight at receiving the material, however, was attributed to the bag rather than the book!

Well, they all thought I'd given them a new shoebag at first! I think this might be the first time they've been given a book. (Teacher)

My Liam came home made up about this bag! He tells me he's going to keep all his books in it. (Parent)

This sounds quite a trivial thing, but one teacher expressed an interesting view on the 'bag effect'.

I'm so glad they didn't choose one of those horrible see-through wallets. The children loved the bag and hopefully they will associate this nice thing with a nice book.

Perhaps the desirability of the bag will rub off on children's feelings towards the book within?

There were also plenty of comments about children's reaction to the book itself, however. For example:

Isa loved the first part of the story – 'On a dark dark hill ...'. He can read all that page by himself now. (Parent)

Some parents/carers and teachers did mention that their children had already seen this particular book, as noted above. One teacher expressed a view about this which drew lots of agreeing signals from her colleagues.

I wished I'd known beforehand that Funnybones would be the book. I would have made sure we hadn't already shown it to the class.

This is an issue of prior communication and the support this might give to teachers' planning. If teachers knew beforehand what the children would be getting in the Booktime book pack, this would enable them to plan how they might use it to best effect.

Two of the 22 teachers who took part in the focus group sessions mentioned a problem peculiar to the make-up of their classes. They both taught in small primary schools and taught mixed age classes of Reception and Year 1 children. The arrival of the Booktime book packs had caused them a problem in that they had to give them only to their Reception children, which they felt was rather unfair to the Year 1 children. There is no easy solution to this problem. Although it will be the case that Year 1 children will already have received a Booktime book pack the previous year, they are probably too young for this, distant, memory to have much impact on their disappointment when their classmates get books and bags and they do not!

Ways in which the book has been used

Almost all the participants in the focus groups had accounts of how they had used the book with children. The following are representative:

The children really liked painting pictures of their own skeletons. One of mine wanted to include a skeleton cat because he didn't have a dog. (Teacher)

I had to read the book to the twins at bedtime lots of times. I said, 'Don't you know it off by heart now?' Freddy said he did but he still wanted me to read it. (Parent)

We put on a big Funnybones display in the children's library and lots of them came in saying they'd got that book. (Librarian)

The principal use of the book seemed, obviously, to have been to read it to and with children. All the teachers and the majority of the parents/carers in the focus groups claimed to have done that, and, moreover, to have done it in a way that was designed to make it a pleasurable experience.

There were several mentions by teachers of using the book to spark off follow up activities (such as the painting mentioned above) but none claimed to have used it for more deliberate teaching purposes (such as a starter text for phonic and/or spelling work). The impression was that the book had been received in the intended spirit – as an incentive to pleasurable interactions surrounding books.

The "Reading with your child" leaflet

Reactions to this were mixed. There were some positive comments. One parent, for example, had learnt from the leaflet that:

It's good to know that I can read part of a book to him if he finds it hard. (Parent)

More common, however, were comments from parents that the leaflet did not tell them as much as they wanted it to:

It was good but I thought it might tell me more about what the teachers do in reading at school. (Parent)

This slightly disappointed reaction was common among the teachers and the librarians.

I wasn't sure about this at first because it doesn't tell them how to read with a child. We get lots of parents who think they have to teach the alphabet or the sounds, and often it does more harm than good. But stressing that reading is fun is really good. (Teacher)

This is quite glossy and it has those lovely Tony Ross pictures. I think the booklet we use here is a bit better, though. It gives a bit more information, I think. (Librarian)

The main point here, we think, is that the majority of schools (and, it appears, Schools Library Services) will already have materials that they use with parents for guidance in reading with young children. It will be very difficult for a nationally produced leaflet to offer the level of detail that individual school leaflets will. Consequently, simpler might be better in terms of offering guidance about "Reading with your child". Perhaps a simple, single page, more cheaply produced leaflet would suffice and the suggestion made to schools that they add their own parental guidance leaflets to the Booktime packs before distributing them.

We should bear in mind, though, the views of the parent above who clearly did want more information, not about how to read with her child, but about how teachers were teaching her child to read. This suggests that there is perhaps more that schools could do in terms of passing on information to their pupils' parents and carers, although it is difficult to see an implication for Booktime in this. Such information would be specific to each school and a generic leaflet could not possibly be adequate.

The Funnybones resource pack including distributables (stickers, bookmarks etc.)

There were some very positive views expressed about the contents of the resource pack, although not all the teachers said they had actually used these resources as yet. Most recognised the universal child appeal of items such as stickers and badges.

The children just loved the stickers and the badges. I think if you gave me enough stickers I could teach any child to read! (Teacher)

The stickers were definitely the most popular item in the packs. Most of these reception class teachers were already well practised in the use of stickers to motivate their pupils, and the Funnybones stickers were apparently simply added to their stock.

Other item such as the badges and bookmarks were less often mentioned, except in an oblique way, for example:

It was really good to have so much choice in the pack. I'm sure I'll use everything eventually. (Teacher)

There were also some suggestions for other items which might have been included in the pack.

My class are really into rubbers at the moment. If there were Funnybones rubbers, they'd really go down well. (Teacher)

How about some of those little moving pictures that they get in comics? (Teacher)

I thought a Funnybones hologram might be a good idea. (Teacher)

Our impression is that the contents of the resource pack were generally perceived as gimmicks by the teachers. They appreciated having lots of things to look at, talk about with their children, and distribute, but none of them really thought these were as important as the book, or, as the next section demonstrates, the activity booklet. On the basis of these responses, stickers would be an essential element in a future resource pack, topped up with innovative gimmicks (the birthday party bag approach!)

The activity sheets and session ideas booklet

The teachers particularly were fulsome in their praise of the activity booklet. They appreciated the quality of production and also of the contents:

What a brilliant book. There are some really great ideas here. (Teacher)

Most said they had found a use for at least one activity/idea from the book.

There were several suggestions, however, for improvements which could be made. There were some comments that in one way the quality of production of the booklet meant that they could not simply photocopy lots of the pages for their children to use. One teacher expressed this as:

I would have liked more black line masters so I could have copied them for all the class to use. (Teacher)

An even more common request was for the material in the activity booklet to be reproduced electronically on the CD accompanying the pack.

Some of the ideas work better than others. Could we have them on the CD as well as in the book, then I could use them on my Interactive whiteboard? (Teacher)

This seems a relatively simple thing to do and would be one strong recommendation arising from this aspect of the evaluation. Technology does move on, however, and we wonder whether it would be possible next year to put a great deal of the supporting material on a specially produced memory stick?

Lots of firms give memory sticks away now. You could include a lot of stuff and I think most of us would rather have a memory stick than a CD. (Teacher)

Other materials

This topic proved the most difficult to get the teachers and librarians to talk about. In 5 of the 6 focus group sessions with these participants, we had to remind them of what other materials they had been provided with as part of the Booktime pack. When these had been brought to their attention, they did make a number of fairly non-committal comments.

The poster looks OK. I might put it up in the classroom to fill a space later. (Teacher)

I've already got plenty of phonics charts so I probably won't use that one. It does look quite nice though. (Teacher)

The most overtly negative comments were reserved for the CD. Participants were almost unanimous in seeing little point to having this in the materials.

That CD was disappointing. I thought there would be some stuff I could use with the children but it was just a promotional video. (Teacher)

What a waste of a CD. It's got loads of room on. They should have put some teaching materials on it as well. (Librarian)

This links with the point made previously about having teaching materials on the CD. Most of the teachers in these focus groups made regular use of an interactive whiteboard in their classrooms and would have appreciated the CD containing texts and activities to help them use the Funnybones book in their class teaching. This may, of course, not be what was intended as part of the Booktime programme, and we should bear in mind the observation we made earlier in this report that teachers had generally used the book as a way of generating enthusiasm for reading rather than as a context for teaching the skills of reading.

The future (likely longer term impact of Booktime)

There was very little disagreement across the focus groups with the idea expressed by one teacher.

I'm sure this will help these children make a really good start in reading. They don't get many treats I think. (Teacher)

Such a positive view was also expressed by several of the parents.

Well Josh put a book on his letter to Santa this year so I think it's had some effect. (Parent)

There were no parent members of the focus groups who expressed any negative feelings about the likely impact of the Booktime scheme on their children's future reading. Teachers were, perhaps, a little more cautious but even here there was still a very positive overall feeling.

It's just one thing, of course, so it's not going to change these children's lives. But with everything else we're doing it might all work together. (Teacher)

The groups were not explicitly asked for their suggestions about future Booktrust initiatives but there were a couple of suggestions spontaneously made. One librarian, for instance, suggested:

They've had Bookstart, now Booktime. I hope there'll be a scheme a bit later as well. Lots of kids, especially boys, seem to switch off reading at about 8 or 9. We need a Books for boys scheme at that age too. (Librarian)

A similar theme emerged in one of the teacher focus groups.

There are so many lovely books for beginning readers. It's usually pretty easy to get them interested in reading. In our school where we have trouble is with the 7 and 8 year olds. If you could have something like Booktime for kids this age you might really do some good. (Teacher)

The teachers here became quite enthusiastic about the possibility of such an initiative and all agreed that Year 3 and 4 children (especially boys) were the group who were most at risk of not establishing habits of reading for pleasure.

Summary

The main evaluative points coming out of this part of the Booktime evaluation were:

The Booktime bag and its contents

- There was a unanimously positive initial reaction in the groups to the bag and the book contained therein.
- Some participants did suggest that this was not the first time the children they were linked with would have seen this particular book. In future, Booktime might provide a gift book that was not quite so universally used already.

Children's reactions to the bag and the book

- Again, the comments of parents and teachers about children's reactions were very positive. Much of the children's delight at receiving the material, however, was attributed to the bag rather than the book!
- Perhaps the desirability of the bag will rub off on children's feelings towards the book within?
- If teachers knew beforehand what they would be getting in the Booktime book pack, this would enable them to plan how they might use it to best effect.
- In mixed age classes of Reception and Year 1 children the Booktime book packs had caused them a problem in that they had to give them only to their Reception children, which they felt was rather unfair to the Year 1 children.

Ways in which the book has been used

- The principal use of the book was reading it to and with children.
- There were several mentions by teachers of using the book to spark off follow up activities but none claimed to have used it for more deliberate teaching purposes.

The “Reading with your child” leaflet

- Reactions to this were mixed.
- Some parents/carers thought that the leaflet did not tell them as much as they wanted it to.
- Teachers and librarians were also slightly disappointed with it.
- Many schools already have materials that they use with parents and carers for guidance in reading with young children. A nationally produced leaflet cannot offer the level of detail that individual school leaflets will.

The Funnybones resource pack including distributables (stickers, bookmarks etc.)

- There were some very positive views expressed about the contents of the resource pack, although not all the teachers said they had actually used these resources as yet.
- The stickers were definitely the most popular item in the resource packs.
- Other item such as the badges and bookmarks were less often mentioned.
- Our impression is that the contents of the resource pack were generally perceived as gimmicks by the teachers.

The activity sheets and session ideas booklet

- The teachers particularly were fulsome in their praise of the activity booklet.
- Most had found a use for at least one activity/idea from the book.
- There were several suggestions, however, for improvements which could be made.
- More photocopiable pages would have been popular.
- An even more common request was for the material in the activity booklet to be reproduced electronically on the CD accompanying the pack.
- We wonder whether it would be possible next year to put a great deal of the supporting material on a specially produced memory stick?

Other materials

- Teachers and librarians were non-committal about other materials in the Booktime resource pack.
- They were negative about the CD film about Booktime, seeing little point to having this in the materials.
- They would have appreciated the CD containing texts and activities to help them use the Funnybones book in class.

The future (likely longer term impact of Booktime)

- There was very little disagreement across the focus groups with the idea that Booktime would help children make a really good start in reading.
- The teachers and librarians were quite enthusiastic about the possibility of a Booktime initiative targeted at Year 3 and 4 children (especially boys).

B. Parent/carers interview findings

1. The Use and Conduct of Interviews

In this evaluation, interviews were used as a means of gathering qualitative data. In this case we were enquiring into the impressions of parents/carers whose children had received a Booktime book pack about the reactions of these children to the material they had received.

A general consensus in terms of research methodology is that interviews have a number of strengths as data-gathering tools.

- They are good for gauging attitudes.
- They allow probing and the posing of follow-up questions by the interviewer.
- They can provide more in-depth information than questionnaires.
- They are useful for exploration as well as confirmation.

These strengths map well onto our purposes for the use of interviews in this evaluation, where we were principally interested in exploring in some depth the attitudes of the participants. We need to recognise, however, that the use of interviews also carries with it some problematic issues in terms of the data gathered.

- Interviews can produce reactive effects: for example, interviewees may express attitudes which they feel the interviewer wishes to hear.
- Interviewees may not remember important information and/or may have a distorted memory of significant events in the formation of their attitudes.
- The perceived anonymity of respondents is low and this may limit what they are prepared to say in an interview.

In our interviewing of the parents/carers in this evaluation, we tried to take account of the above potential problems by the following strategies.

- All interviews were carried out in participants' homes and on their terms. Venue was seen as a particularly important feature and it was clear at several points that participants were less constrained to 'please the interviewer' than had sometimes seemed to be the case in the focus group interviews (in which parents/carers had been asked to come into their children's schools). Participants also had complete freedom over the duration of each interview, and it was always their decision when to terminate the event. Interviews thus ranged from 45 minutes to one and a half hours, and the amount of 'social talk' each contained was determined by the individual participant.
- Interviews did not follow a set agenda. We did approach them with a number of issues we wished to discuss with participants (see below) and we began each interview by explaining to the parent/carers what these issues were. From that point on, however, there was considerable freedom given to participants in how they responded to the starting statements we used (or indeed, whether they responded). Each interview was therefore very open-ended and our concern was always to follow the line of thinking of each participant rather than impose our agenda upon them.
- All participants were assured at the beginning of each interview (and beforehand in our initial contact with them to arrange these interviews) of absolute

confidentiality in the outcomes of what they told us. None of them would be identified in any report of the outcomes of the interviews. For a small number of them we were specifically asked whether personnel at their child's school would know what they said in the interview and, again, we assured them that, although school personnel did know they were being interviewed (these parents/carers for the most part had been suggested by the head teacher of schools in the West Midlands area) their responses in the interview would be completely anonymous.

Interviews were, therefore, conducted more in the form of conversations rather than question-answer sessions. This had the advantage of allowing a good deal more probing and follow-up of responses that would otherwise have been the case.

2. Participants

The interview participants were 25 parents/carers whose children had received book packs as part of the Booktime programme. 24 of the parents/carers were resident in the Warwickshire (7) / Coventry (9) / Solihull (8) areas, and their children attended schools who were members of the University of Warwick teacher training partnership. One parent was resident in Scotland and was included in the sample following her participation in market research the previous summer with parents and carers of suitably aged children.

The participants were all volunteers. In the case of the West Midlands parents, we were given a list of suggested names by the head teachers of primary schools in the University of Warwick Primary Teacher Training Partnership. The schools contacted had not previously been involved in our evaluation so the list of parents and carers they suggested produced a completely different sample from that previously used in the focus group interviews. The original list of suggested parents/carers contained 34 names. We approached these in random order to ask if they would be willing to participate in the interviews until we had the required 24 agreed participants. In fact, only one parent declined (she did not give a reason). Interviews of these parents/carers, and the lone parent in Scotland, were carried out during January and February, 2008.

Participants were from a range of social backgrounds. We did not ask them for details of their backgrounds (this not being one of our research questions) and our judgement about the range they represented is made largely on the basis on geographical location, which may, of course, be misleading as an accurate guide. What we can say is that of the 25, 6 belonged to minority ethnic groups and 4 showed evidence of using English as an additional language (two of whom told us they had arrived relatively recently in this country from Poland). 24 of the 25 were female and the solitary male was, he informed us at the interview, a single parent.

3. Interview contents

The interviews were conducted according to the following 'rules':

- Each interview was conducted in the participant's home and began with social 'chat' as we got to know each other. In every case, tea or coffee was offered to

us at the beginning of the interview and the making and drinking of this was used as an 'ice-breaking' opportunity.

- Each interview proper was begun with a statement that we were enquiring into the Booktime programme and how it was working, and we were interested in parents' views about this.
- We introduced ourselves as being from Warwick University and being outside the Booktime programme, having no direct involvement with it other than having been asked to evaluate it.
- In each interview, we had a list of topics we wished to explore but these were often not initially expressed as questions. We explained to the participants that our main role was to listen to what they had to say. We did use questions as follow up to the introduction of particular topics as we tried to probe initial responses. There were many occasions, however, on which this was unnecessary as participants tended to be fairly talkative without our prompting. In only one of the 25 interviews was the conversation at all 'difficult' as the parent began to explain a problem she was currently having with her child's teacher, who was not, apparently, giving this child sufficient individual attention in reading. We allowed this conversation to proceed for a while before bringing the parent back to Booktime by explaining that this was actually not connected with the school's provision.

Our initial list of topics was as follows:

- The Booktime bag and its contents (introduced in words such as, "We would be really interested in what you thought about the book and the bag your child was given as part of Booktime.")
- Children's reactions to the bag and the book. ("I don't know what (name of child) thought about the book.")
- Ways in which the book has been used. ("There are lots of things you might have done with the book when (name of child) brought it home.")
- The "Reading with your child" leaflet. ("Some parents have found this leaflet very useful and others haven't.")
- The impact of the Booktime pack on their children's reading. ("Would you say the Booktime book pack has helped (name of child) in beginning reading?")
- The future and likely longer term impact of Booktime. ("So, do you think Booktime should carry on next year or should they do something different?" and "I wonder if (child's name) will have forgotten all about Booktime in a couple of years.")

During each interview, we were also able, briefly, to talk to the participating child, always in the presence of at least one of their parents/carers. The conversation proceeded in the following way:

- 1) "Do you remember the Funnybones book you were given at school?"
- 2) Some children needed the prompt of, "You remember, it came in that blue bag."
- 3) For 22 out of the 25 this was sufficient and they produced the book itself (it sometimes took a bit of searching!).
- 4) With the remaining 3, we showed them a copy of the book and they all then claimed to remember it.
- 5) We then made a statement along the lines of, "I really liked the bit when ...".
- 6) 20 of the 25 children then told us about bits that they liked without further prompting.

- 7) With the remaining 5, we asked them directly to show us a bit they liked and they each did.
- 8) If they showed interest in reading out loud to us from the book, we greeted that with enthusiasm but this was not something we directly asked them to do (in three cases the parent/carer volunteered the child for reading aloud and fortunately in each case this was not a problem for the child.)
- 9) Our over-riding principle was that our conversation with the child had to be *fun* and not construed as any kind of a test of their reading. We think that, in all cases except perhaps for one, we were successful in this. In one case, coincidentally the interview in which the parent had expressed concern about her daughter's school, there was clearly an element of 'showing off' the child's reading prowess to us. We simply listened and responded enthusiastically to this.

4. Interview outcomes

In the following sections, we will report the outcomes of the interview discussions about each of the topics. We will indicate in our reporting, the extent to which certain views were expressed by participating parents/carers, and children. In general, we will not report views which were only expressed by one or two parents.

a) *The Booktime bag and its contents*

There was unanimous appreciation of the gift their children had received. Several parents/carers (16) made positive comments about the quality of the book.

That was a really good choice of book – Joanne really liked it.

What a nice book! We didn't get given books like that when I was at school.

I quite like looking at this book myself. I really like the drawings.

4 parents/carers, interestingly enough the parents of boys, made comments about the nature of the book in which they indicated their children would have preferred a non-fiction book.

I think Jamie would have liked something about dinosaurs or cars. He likes fact books more than stories.

The story's quite good fun but I think he wanted more information in it.

3 parents/carers, while expressing gratitude for having received the book, had some doubts about its suitability.

I was a bit surprised it was about skeletons. Don't you think that's a bit scary?

Lianne liked the book but I thought it was a bit frightening for her. She does have nightmares sometimes and I don't want to make it worse.

For 5 parents/carers, the attraction of the Booktime book pack appeared to rest not so much on its contents but on its cost. The following remark was typical of this group:

Of course we liked it! It's not often you get something for free, is it?

b) Children's reactions to the bag and the book (reported by parents/carers)

20 of the parents/carers reported a very positive reaction to the Booktime book pack on the part of their children.

He came home thrilled with the bag and the book.

Alexander already has the Funnybones book but he still loved being given the pack. He's given his old book to his little sister.

Emily brings other books home from school so we didn't know at first that this was special. She soon told us though!

For the 5 remaining parents/carers, the reactions were not negative but rather non-committal.

Well, he quite liked it. I still think he would have liked an information book better.

It was OK. He didn't want to read the book to me though. He was much more interested in watching the telly when he came home.

Inevitably, reactions to the bag were as positive as reactions to the book. 18 of the group said that their children had been very pleased with the bag.

She really loved that bag. She keeps her colouring pens in it now.

It was the bag as much as the book, you know. That's a clever idea!

I think bookshops should sell books to children in bags like that. Jamie would certainly want us to buy more books if they did.

In 22 of the 25 homes we visited we saw evidence that the bag was still a treasured item, and 8 children still kept their Funnybones book in the bag!

One parent reported explicitly what many of them hinted at:

I think having the book in the bag definitely makes the children want to read it more. They all love things like bags, don't they?

c) Children's reactions to the Booktime book pack (reported by children)

As we mentioned above, for 22 out of the 25 children that we talked to the question, "Do you remember the Funnybones book you were given at school?" and,

sometimes, the prompt of, “You remember, it came in that blue bag” were sufficient to get them to remember and then produce the book itself. With the remaining 3, we showed them a copy of the book and they all then claimed to remember it. This suggests that the impact of the book and its bag had been very high on this particular group of children. There were, as far as we could tell, no negative reactions to the book at all among these children: indeed, big smiles were far more characteristic of their reactions.

When we then made a statement along the lines of, “I really liked the bit when ...”, this led to 20 of the 25 children telling us about bits that they liked without any further prompting. With the remaining 5, we asked them directly to show us a bit they liked and they could each do that.

8 of the children (including 3 who were volunteered by their parents/carers) read aloud to us from the book, in each case with good expression and obvious understanding. 7 others did not read aloud (they were not directly asked to) but did point to illustrations in the book with obvious signs of enjoyment.

As mentioned above, 22 of these children could produce the bag in which they received the book, and 8 of them still kept the book in this bag. All of the others were using the bag to store other items including other books (6), toys (7) and a collection of small stones (1).

d) Ways in which the book had been used

A range of ways of using the book were reported. These are listed as follows:

- parent/carer reading the book to/with the child (reported by 21 parents);
- parent/carer and child talking about the pictures in the book (17);
- child drawing his/her own pictures of the book characters (11);
- child retelling story to the parent/carer (7);
- parent/carer asking child to read the book to her/him (6);
- parent/carer and child taking turns to read parts of the book (4);
- parent/carer talking about individual words in the story with child (4);
- child and parent/carer acting out parts of the story (3).

Given the age and reading experience level of these children, this is quite a positive finding in that it suggests that these parents and carers were generally not trying to force their children to read aloud but were allowing enjoyment of the shared reading experience to take precedence.

Nobody in the sample mentioned using the book to teach sounds and letters to their children, again an indication of the lack of pressure to learn that was characteristic here.

One parent did express this idea quite forcefully:

I think the teachers can teach her how to read. I'm much more interested in making sure she wants to.

e) The “Reading with your child” leaflet

Reactions to the book and the bag were, as detailed above, very positive overall among this group of parents and carers. Reactions to the reading leaflet were, however, much more mixed.

Some parents/carers appreciated the presence of such a leaflet. 6 expressed opinions such as the follows:

It's nice to have some suggestions about how to help your children reading.

That's a nice leaflet and I think it's useful.

I can't see why people wouldn't find it useful. We need all the help we can get.

Many more, however, expressed disappointment with the leaflet. For 10 it simply did not go far enough.

I was hoping for a bit more advice on what to do to help.

I picked that up thinking it would give me some ideas about helping Emily read better. But it doesn't tell you much really.

I never was very good myself at reading at school. I think I need a bit more help than that. How can I help my Liam? What's the best thing to do?

For 4 parents, the leaflet was disappointing because they had already had what they saw as much better advice from the schools their children were attending.

I think the booklet she brought home at the beginning of last term was better. I wanted to know what the school would be doing, so I could help, and that told me.

School sent us a leaflet before Jamie even started and it was really good. Very practical.

f) The impact of the Booktime book pack on children's reading

This is probably the most important of the topics we explored during the interviews as it bears directly upon the fundamental question surrounding the Booktime programme – was it worth it? The evidence from these interviews suggests that the answer to this question should certainly be positive. We need, however, to bear in mind the nature of the evidence we are presenting here. This is not objective data in the sense of external assessments of the progress in reading made by the children involved. Given the young age of these children and the ‘blunt instrument’ nature of most assessments of reading progress, there was no conceivable way in which our evaluation could have gathered such objective data. The target children had been in school for 5 months or so. Their progress in actually reading would, within the span of our evaluation, have been fairly minimal anyway, and almost certainly not measurable in an objective sense.

The aim of Booktime has never been expressed in terms of improvements in measurable reading ability in the children involved (although its aspirations would certainly include that). The aim, rather, was “to promote the pleasure of books and shared reading, by encouraging parents and carers to set aside some time each week to read aloud with their child.” (Hope-Stone, H. (2007) *Booktime Evaluation* London: Booktrust). The same report stated the objectives as being “to enhance the skills and confidence of parents and carers and support family reading, particularly in deprived areas”. The focus of our interviews, therefore, was on this aim, although in all interviews we also asked parents and carers whether they thought that having received the Booktime book pack had impacted in any way on their children’s reading ability. Their responses, although of course subjective rather than objective evidence, were almost unanimously positive.

This was one of the few parts of the interviews which we did initiate with a question: “Would you say the Booktime book pack has helped (name of child) in beginning reading?” 23 of the 25 parents gave the instant response to this question – “Yes”. The first response of the remaining 2 parents was, “I’m not sure.”

We probed these responses further, using open questions such as, “What makes you say that?” Parents elaborated a number of reasons for their views. These are summarised in the table below.

| <i>Generalised statement made by parents</i> | <i>No. of parents making such a statement</i> |
|--|--|
| My child asks me to read to him/her more often than before | 19 |
| My child is a lot keener about books that he/she was | 18 |
| My child talks about books more than before | 16 |
| My child has brought books home from school to read | 15 |
| My child has read aloud to me from Funnybones | 14 |
| My child has asked for books as presents | 13 |

N.B. Parents/carers often made more than one of these statements.

These responses suggest that the perceptions of these parents and carers were that the Booktime experience had definitely affected their children’s attitudes towards, and expertise in, reading for the better.

g) The future and likely longer term impact of Booktime

Our conversations around this topic were intended to get the parents/carers’ perspectives on two issues. The first was what they thought the future of Booktime might look like (“So, do you think Booktime should carry on next year or should they do something different?”), and the second was their views on any longer impact of Booktime on their own child (“I wonder if (child’s name) will have forgotten all about Booktime in a couple of years.”)

For 16 of the 25 parents, the question of the future of Booktime was relatively simple. They thought it should carry on because then their younger children would also have the experience of receiving a book pack.

His little sister is already asking when she's going to get her bag.

I heard Kaylee telling her brother the other day that he would get a book in a bag if he was good at school.

I hope it's still going when the twins go to school. But they'd better get one each or we'd never hear the last of it!

6 of this group also thought Booktime should continue because of its highlighting the enjoyment of books among all the other things children could do.

I'm sure kids don't read as much as they used to – they've all got their playstations these days. Giving them books like this might be the only way to get them going in their reading.

They get free toys from Macdonalds so I think they should get free books as well.

Of the remaining 9 parents/carers, 5 gave a mixture of reasons why the scheme should continue.

It's a lovely idea. It would be a shame to stop it now.

It definitely makes them like books more so I think they should carry it on, yes I do.

Only 4 of the parents/carers had negative views about the future of Booktime and even then, these were pretty mild.

I'm not sure. Maybe you can only do things like this once. They aren't the same twice.

It can't go on forever. Better to have a big splash and stop before it gets boring.

When it came to the longer term impact on their own children, the majority of the parents/carers were fairly realistic. Only 3 expressed the view that the impact would be a very long term one.

Well, I think it's changed Charlotte. She feels differently about books now.

I can still remember my first book. I bet he remembers this one.

Others were more sanguine in their views.

Lots of things happen in kids' lives. I'm sure they forget most things even the good ones.

Yeah. I'm sure in a year or two it'll all be forgotten. She'll probably be into Barbie dolls or something by then.

Perhaps the most considered reaction came from one parent whose son she reported as being 'over the moon' with the book.

Well, of course, Sam thinks it's brilliant now but he's bound to forget, isn't he? They always do. But you hope that some little bit of that good feeling might just stay around. I guess it's my job now, to keep him interested and keen. Booktime's a good start but we haven't got there yet.

These reactions suggest an enthusiastic, but honest, appraisal of the long term impact of the Booktime programme. Most of these parents/carers were not naïve about the long term impact of a single event, however pleasurable that event was. They recognised, for most implicitly, that it would need sustained activity to make a significant change in long term behaviour.

Summary

The main evaluative points coming out of this part of the Booktime evaluation were:

a) The Booktime bag and its contents (reported by parents/carers)

- There was unanimous appreciation of the gift their children had received.
- The majority made positive comments about the quality of the book.
- A few parents/carers - of boys - suggested their children would have preferred a non-fiction book.
- A small number had some doubts about its suitability and whether it was too frightening.
- For a few, the attraction of the Booktime pack appeared to rest not so much on its contents but on its cost.

b) Children's reactions to the bag and the book (reported by parents/carers)

- A large majority of the parents/carers reported a very positive reaction to the Booktime book pack on the part of their children.
- The reactions of the remainder were not negative but rather non-committal.
- Inevitably, reactions to the bag were as positive as reactions to the book.
- In a lot of the homes, there was evidence that the bag was still a treasured item.

c) Children's reactions to the Booktime book pack (reported by children)

- All of the children interviewed could remember the Booktime book they had received.
- Only a few needed prompting.
- The impact of the book and its bag had been very high on these children.
- There were no negative reactions to the book at all.
- A large majority of the children could tell us about bits in the book that they liked.
- The rest were able to show us a bit they liked.
- About a third of the children could read aloud to us from the book with good expression and understanding.
- A further third could point to illustrations in the book with obvious signs of enjoyment.
- The vast majority of the group could produce the bag in which they received the book, and they were all actively using the bag for a range of purposes.

d) Ways in which the book had been used

- A range of ways of using the book were reported, including:
 - Parent/carer reading the book to/with the child;
 - parent/carer and child talking about the pictures in the book;
 - child drawing his/her own pictures of the book characters;
 - child retelling story to the parent/carer;
 - parent/carer asking child to read the book to her/him;
 - parent/carer and child taking turns to read parts of the book;
 - parent/carer talking about individual words in the story with child;
 - child and parent/carer acting out parts of the story.
- None of the parents/carers had used the book to teach sounds and letters to their children.

e) The “Reading with your child” leaflet

- Reactions to the reading leaflet were mixed.
- Some parents/carers appreciated the presence of such a leaflet.
- Many more, however, expressed disappointment with the leaflet.
- For several it was not sufficiently specific about how to help their children with reading.
- For a few, the leaflet was disappointing because they had already had better advice from their children’s schools.

f) The impact of the Booktime book pack on children’s reading

- The vast majority of parents/carers answered “Yes” to the question, “Would you say the Booktime pack has helped your child in beginning reading?”
- When asked to explain their reasons for this answer, they gave a number of responses.
 - My child asks me to read to/with him/her more often than before
 - My child is a lot keener about books that he/she was
 - My child talks about books more than before
 - My child has brought books home from school to read
 - My child has read aloud to me from Funnybones
 - My child has asked for books as presents

g) The future and likely longer term impact of Booktime

- Two thirds of the parents thought Booktime should carry on because their younger children would also have the experience of receiving a book pack.
- Some of this group also thought Booktime had highlighted the enjoyment of books among all the other things children could do.
- A smaller number suggested other reasons why the scheme should continue.
- Only a few had negative views about the future of Booktime and these were pretty mild.
- Very few, however, thought that the impact of Booktime would be a long term one.
- Most recognised that it would need sustained activity to make a significant change in long term behaviour.

C. Teacher questionnaire findings

1. The Use of Questionnaires

In this evaluation, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of teachers of reception children in schools in England. The purpose of this questionnaire was to survey the responses of these teachers to the Booktime concept, its contents and its implementation during 2007-08. As a mechanism for obtaining information fairly quickly and easily, questionnaires have a number of advantages and disadvantages when compared with other research tools. The key strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires are summarised below.

Advantages of questionnaires

- They give respondents time to consider their responses carefully without interference from the researcher.
- They are generally cost-effective. It is possible to provide questionnaires to large numbers of people simultaneously.
- They provide uniformity in the sense that each respondent receives an identical set of questions. With closed-form questions, responses are standardised, which can assist in interpreting from large numbers of respondents.
- They can address a large number of issues and questions of concern in a relatively efficient way, with the possibility of a high response rate.
- Often, questionnaires are designed so that answers to questions are scored and scores summed to obtain an overall measure of the attitudes and opinions of the respondents.
- They may be distributed to respondents via the post or email (although these approaches may lower the response rate).
- They permit anonymity. It is usually argued that anonymity increases the rate of response and may increase the likelihood that responses reflect genuinely held opinions.

Disadvantages of questionnaires

- It may be difficult to obtain a good response rate. Often there is no strong motivation for respondents to respond.
- They are complex instruments and, if badly designed, can be misleading.
- They are an unsuitable method of evaluation if probing is required – there is usually no real possibility for follow-up on answers.
- Quality of data is probably not as high as with alternative methods of data collection, such as personal interviewing.
- They can be misused – a mistake is to try to read too much into questionnaire results.

In general, questionnaires are effective mechanisms for efficient collection of certain kinds of information. They are not, however, a comprehensive means of evaluation and should be used, as they have been in this evaluation, to support and supplement other procedures for evaluating educational initiatives.

2. Participants

The targeted participants for the questionnaire were teachers of reception-age children (4-5 year olds) in primary schools in England. These were randomly selected, but with some stratification to ensure that they represented a cross section of schools across England. The sampling frame we used included the following specifications:

- about ten local authorities in each of the nine English regions were selected at random;
- about 15 schools in each of these local authorities were randomly selected;

This gave us an initial targeted sample of 1239 schools, and questionnaires were sent by email to the head teachers of each of these schools, with a covering note asking the head teacher to pass the questionnaire on to a reception class teacher in his/her school.

The questionnaires were emailed to schools between the 14th and 18th December, 2007. The timing of this distribution was necessary to fit with the timetable for the evaluation, although it is recognised that it was probably not the most convenient time for schools to receive it, because of Christmas festivities, etc. This may well have interfered with the response rate to the questionnaire.

By the second week in January 2008, about 300 completed questionnaires had been received from teachers. A telephone follow-up to schools who had not yet responded produced a further response and by mid-February, 465 completed questionnaires had been received, giving a final response rate of 37.5%. Consensus within the social sciences is that response rates from 25% to 35% are normal for anonymously distributed questionnaires, so a response rate of 37.5% is pleasingly above average.

Interestingly, of the 465 questionnaires which were returned, only 71 were returned via the same media as that through which they were delivered – email. Thus, for 394 of the respondents, returning the questionnaire actually cost them money!

3. Questionnaire contents

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information about several issues. We wanted to know about the following:

- Schools' experiences of the Booktime programme, including receipt of the materials, the uses made of these and any follow up activities they had stimulated.
- The reactions of the children to the Booktime materials.
- Teachers' evaluations of the Booktime materials and the programme as a whole.

The vast majority of the questions used in the questionnaire demanded only the ticking of appropriate boxes, although there were three points at which teachers were invited to write answers into a box. (A copy of the questionnaire is given in Appendix 1 of this report).

4. Results

Full details of the responses made to each question in the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2 of this report. In the present section, we will summarise the main findings.

Question 1 was designed to produce a picture of the logistical features of the Booktime programme, that is, the delivery of the book packs to schools. The proportions of respondents responding positively to elements of this question are shown in the following table.

| <i>Sub-question</i> | <i>% of total respondents responding Yes</i> |
|---|---|
| Did you have prior notice of the packs arriving? | 57.0 |
| Did the packs arrive at a suitable time in the school term? | 94.8 |
| Did your school receive enough book packs for all Reception/Primary 1 pupils for the school year 2007-08? | 80.4 |

The message from these responses was largely a positive one, although a few schools were obviously disappointed with the numbers of packs they received. The most important lesson to be learnt for future iterations of Booktime seems to be that schools would appreciate prior notice of the receipt of such packs of materials. This was an issue which was also raised by teachers in the focus groups.

Question 2 asked teachers for an indication of how much their pupils enjoyed receiving the various items in the Booktime packs. The following table shows the percentage of respondents who said their pupils either enjoyed an item very much or quite enjoyed it.

| <i>Booktime children's item</i> | <i>% of total respondents who said their pupils either enjoyed very much or quite enjoyed this</i> |
|--|---|
| The Funnybones book | 96.1 |
| The stickers | 91.0 |
| The badges | 86.0 |
| The bookmarks | 83.4 |
| The book plates | 73.1 |

These results suggest a very positive reception of the Booktime packs by pupils, with the book itself being almost universally welcomed. The book plates were slightly less enthusiastically welcomed, although this might be accounted for by the fact that almost 10% of the teachers said they had not yet distributed these.

Questions 3 and 4 focused on teachers' use (or lack of use) of the *Funnybones* book with their classes. 88.6% of them said they had used the book, with 87.1% claiming that their pupils had enjoyed the reading. A further 7.7% said that they planned to use the book in the future.

Of the small number of teachers who had not used the book, 5 said they did not think it was appropriate for their children, and 3 said they had not yet had time. They were invited to write in other reasons why they had not yet used the book, and 14 teachers took advantage of this opportunity, advancing a range of reasons. The most common, contributed by 7 teachers, was an explanation which stated that the book would be used at a later date, when it would fit better with the then class topic, for example:

We are waiting till later in the spring term when we have a topic "my body". We will give out the resources then.

We plan to use Funnybones next term as our topic is "people who help us". It will tie nicely with hospitals, doctors and singing the song.

The overwhelming outcome of this section of the questionnaire was, therefore, that the book had been very gratefully received by teachers, most of whom had made very good use of it.

Questions 5, 6, 7 and 8 focused on teachers' views about, and uses of, the linked resources which accompanied the *Funnybones* book.

The following table shows the percentage of teachers who said they thought items in the resource pack were either very useful or quite useful.

| Resource item | % of total respondents who said this was either very useful or quite useful |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Big book | 86.7 |
| Funnybones poster | 75.9 |
| 'Reading with your Child' booklet | 73.8 |
| Teacher stickers | 72.7 |
| Phonics wall frieze | 66.9 |
| CD-Rom film | 37.2 |

There were some mixed responses here. The big book was very positively received but the phonics wall frieze and the CD-Rom less well thought of. These responses can be compared with the comments by members of the focus groups, which make it clear that these items, especially the CD-Rom, were generally not valued.

The following table shows the percentage of teachers who said they had used items from the collection of activity materials they were given in the Booktime resource pack.

| Activity | % of total respondents saying they had used this activity |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Funnybones song | 41.9 |
| Picture story | 38.7 |
| Building a skeleton | 37.2 |
| Make a Funnybones mask | 33.8 |
| Spot the difference | 33.5 |
| Finger puppets | 31.0 |
| Skeleton maze | 30.8 |
| Which animal | 26.9 |
| Make a moving dog skeleton | 25.4 |
| Who is in the bin? | 21.1 |
| Create your own story | 20.4 |
| Skeleton silly walks rhymes | 20.0 |
| On your way to school | 17.8 |
| Funnybones collage | 16.3 |
| Design a Funnybones car | 7.7 |

These are somewhat surprising results in that they do not show a great deal of use being made of the activities and materials supplied. It will be recalled that the reactions to these activities of the teachers and librarians in the focus groups were very positive. As one teacher put it:

What a brilliant book. There are some really great ideas here.

Yet only five of the activities had, from the questionnaire, been used by more than one third of the responding teachers, which is a slightly disappointing uptake. These responses were assuaged somewhat, however, by the comments which teachers wrote in response to the invitation in question 7 for comments or suggestions about the activity materials. 183 responding teachers made comments here (out of 465 completed questionnaires – a 39.4% response rate, which is unusually high for a write-in question on a postal questionnaire)

48 of these teachers made comments which indicated that they had used several of the activities, and other activities of their own devising, and were very appreciative of the resources they had been given.

We used ideas from the book to enrich provision areas e.g. Skeletons in water/sand. Role play- made a dark dark house- children used wind up torches-dressed up. Planned other activities around other areas of curriculum e.g. made skeleton pictures with art straws/musical work skeleton dance-bones clanging. Knowledge and understanding our body -large skeleton, jigsaw/life size model. X-rays.

We thought this was a brilliant scheme and very much appreciated the resources. It fitted perfectly with our night time topic. We would be very happy to receive any more packs like this.

We spent a week working with the book and also retold the story in small world, dug for bones in the sand tray (to sort into real and silly words) and create a collage storyboard for a class display.

Fantastic ideas. We do Funnybones each year and it was lovely to have some new, practical, creative activities.

Teachers who had not used the activities gave a number of reasons for this. By far the largest number of comments (72) were variations on the theme that they appreciated the activities very much but the detailed planning for that term's work had already been done and so the activities could not be used to the extent they would have liked.

I had already planned units of work for the term, which made it difficult to incorporate the activity materials. If I had prior notification of them I may have been able to plan a unit of work incorporating them.

Would like to use more of the above and probably will in the future but we had already planned activities for this term. If this is repeated next year we will definitely plan more of these activities.

Would have loved to incorporate more of the activities into environment but did not have much time to plan into activities, also topic in school was not relevant to book.

We were doing a topic on ourselves at the time the packs arrived, the topic already had many activities planned for and the book fitted in perfectly but didn't really have time to do all the other suggested activities, we may plan to do some of them in future though when we use the book again.

A few teachers (8) blamed a lack of time for their not being able to use the activities.

The activity ideas were excellent. Unfortunately we did not have enough time to use all of the resources at this point in the term but I hope to use them in the future.

Rather more teachers (but still only 22 – a small number in comparison with the total number of respondents) claimed that the activities were unsuitable, for various reasons, for the children they taught.

The paper skeletons to make were far too fiddly for young children to attempt with any degree of independence. All the activities were adult led or to a great degree adult initiated. Some ideas to encourage children to spontaneously engage would have been helpful.

Some of the activities were too small to be used by reception children. The skeleton mask was ideal size.

Our class now contains 4 years olds and some of the activities were inappropriate for such young children - needed too much adult help. We have a class of 33 children with only 2 staff.

I didn't use these with my FS2 class as our curriculum is a totally practical one and we don't use "worksheets" as such.

Finally, 19 teachers claimed that they had not actually received these activities, or had received them later than the book bags.

The Teacher pack and Support material arrived several weeks after the children's book arrived and were used by the children. (We devised our own activities). We would have got more out of the project if everything had arrived together.

Only received the small books in bags so can't comment on the above materials.

I don't remember getting this material, were they on the CD ROM?

Both reception classes received books and bags only. This may have been decided by management and other items may have gone to year 1.

When the responses to this question about the use of the activities are read alongside explanations of why the *Funnybones* book had not yet been used by some teachers, and compared to the finding (from Question 1) that 57% of the teachers had had no prior notice of the arrival of the Booktime packs, a common thread seems to emerge. These findings suggest that many teachers make quite detailed advanced plans for the work they wish to cover with their classes in a particular term, and, unless they are given sufficient advanced warning, then the arrival even of materials as exciting as the Booktime resource packs will not cause them to alter these long-term plans. It may be that, in order to have the greatest possible impact upon classroom practice, increased communication about a programme like Booktime needs to be delivered to teachers at least a term ahead of the materials actually arriving. It might be worth exploring alternative, or additional, channels of communication to schools, perhaps via Local Authorities, to ensure this happens.

Question 9 asked respondents about ways in which they had extended their class reading activities in response to Booktime. Responses were generally not very positive. Only 8% of respondents said they had organised a visit to a local public library linked to Booktime, and only 14.6% had invited parents and carers into their schools for any activities or events linked to Booktime. These results suggest that, if such activities are thought valuable, it might be worth enhancing communication suggesting them to teachers in future iterations of Booktime, perhaps through the use of case studies and other examples of good practice.

Question 10 asked teachers for their general feelings about the Booktime programme. They were asked to respond to three specific statements, and the following table shows the percentage of teachers who either agreed or strongly agreed with each of these statements.

| Statement | % of total respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing |
|---|---|
| <i>The purpose of Booktime is clear</i> | 93.5 |
| <i>Booktime is a valuable programme</i> | 96.4 |
| <i>I am happy to support Booktime</i> | 95.5 |

These responses suggest almost universal support for the programme from these teachers.

In the final question (**Question 11**) respondents were asked for any further comments or suggestions about how Booktime might be improved in the future. 143 teachers took advantage of this opportunity to make comments, 31.4% of the total number of respondents. Their comments fell into a number of categories.

59 teachers made generally very supportive comments, praising the scheme and thanking Booktrust for it.

2nd year we've been involved and it has improved on the first year. The children think it is fab to get a free book- the choice this year was excellent! Can't wait for next year's book!

Any project stimulating children's interest in the books is worthwhile, particularly in the area our school is in, where few children have access at home to a variety of books.

Book time is fantastic - children in my school have little and very few books. They just love their books and how it is presented in the back pack. I loved the resources too - we had lots of great learning opportunities. Thank you.

Bringing books home has motivated the children who might not otherwise be enthused about books. They enjoy using bags as well.

Fantastic. We got a whole weeks work from these materials at Halloween. Super displays and good home/school links. The children thoroughly enjoyed and learnt lots. They still remember it now.

I can't wait till next time. The parents shared the big books at home with their child and received their small book as a reward for parents' comments.

I think the Booktime project is fantastic. I wasn't sure about the choice of book. Funnybones is quite wordy for foundation children (esp. with EAL) but the children loved it especially the boys.

It is an excellent idea. The books arrived at an ideal time. We had just started giving the children reading books to take home and we gave them all a Booktime bag with resources to take home at this time.

It's a great welcome to the reception class and the leaflet encourages parents to read the books with their child. The big book and alphabet frieze are used frequently in class. It is hard to involve parents or visit the library in the first few weeks when the children need a consistent routine to help them settle in.

Super resource inspired boys. We turned our role play house into 'a dark, dark house' with skeleton costumes. Very successful.

The big book is a really good resource and a great way to introduce a love of reading to the children (as is the take home pack). We used the book as a focus for learning over 2 weeks.

The children have really enjoyed having their own copy of a book that we have read as a class.

Comments were not always positive, however. A few teachers (6) took advantage of the opportunity to make constructive criticism of the scheme and of individual elements of it. Some examples of these comments are given below.

Although I think it's a good initiative, I feel to give everyone the same book is a missed opportunity for sharing lots of books while still retaining ownership of one.

As a personal view I think that the children that come from literate home environments will use the book (but have books at home anyway), those who don't will not receive support or encouragement to access it. I don't believe it will raise the profile of literacy or is cost effective.

Slightly more teachers (10) made comments complaining that parts of the pack had not arrived, or did not arrive at the right time.

Ensure that enough packs are sent to the school. It took over two months for us to receive everything and many phone calls. This impacted on how much we could use everything.

Parts of my school pack must have been missing, having received this questionnaire it looks like there should have been a booklet for parents and an explanation of Booktime something to do with libraries? I received a big book, stickers + some of the sheets but no letter etc.

11 teachers made comments suggesting that materials in the packs were unsuitable for the children they were aimed at. These ranged from thoughts that the book itself was too difficult for the target audience:

Funny bones a little difficult for reception children.

Many of our parents are illiterate or EAL so found material too difficult. Also some didn't understand they could keep the book and kept bringing it back.

to comments, reflecting the politically correct nature of our times, that the book offended certain groups of parents/children:

Perhaps think carefully about the choice of text. We actually had a few concerns from parents as they felt that the book could be scary (although I reassured them that I'd read it in a fun, 'silly' way!) and that it was contrary to Christian values.

Please have a book which is more appropriate to the age and needs of reception class children e.g. Dear Zoo, since we are not allowed to teach Halloween or do Halloween activities in schools, the skeleton book just wasn't really right. Excellent idea with super resources, just wrong content.

A larger number of teachers (26) commented on the need for more advanced notice of the delivery of the packs. This is a theme which was raised in answers to earlier questions in this questionnaire, and was also raised by teachers in the focus groups.

Advance notice of the intended book so that our long term planning can incorporate this. Now I am aware of how the project works. I could better use resources in the future.

It would be useful to know when they are coming early on in the term so it can be incorporated into the planning.

Let us know in advance when the books are arriving so they can be used more effectively. Maybe a letter was sent but got lost! It's a great idea but could possibly be more publicized. Thank you.

Planning for the Autumn Term is done in early July so schools need to know all details of the project to use this resource to fullest advantage.

We had no prior notice about the books arriving, we could have used them more profitably for the children had we been able to plan this in e.g. talking to parents at the start of the term, letting them know the books were on their way. We had an email 18/10/07 - we needed to know summer term.

Finally 23 teachers made suggestions for ways in which the Booktime programme could be improved. These range from ideas about enhancing the appeal of the Booktime material to children with English as an Additional Language:

Bilingual reading with your child booklets.

We have a lot of children with English as their second language-more leaflets etc. in other language would have been useful.

to suggestions about improving the logistics of the scheme:

It would be good to have communication with someone in person to discuss the programme.

It would be useful for an extra pack for the reception teacher to model using with the pupils.

Make sure it is addressed clearly to reception teacher. HT opened and distributed to various other staffs in different year groups.

and included ideas about electronic extensions to the materials provided:

Please could we have access or details where we could find talking stories/DVDs linked to text.

Some interactive internet activities per pupil to use would be useful, or the books as PowerPoint presentations. Children really enjoyed Funny bones; we read other books in the series but for large group we watched episodes on You Tube on interactive whiteboard. Brilliant can't wait to see next year's story. Many thanks.

Songs linked to the story. Talking story.

Summary

The main evaluative points coming out of this part of the Booktime evaluation were:

The logistical features of the Booktime programme

- There was a largely positive response to the organisation of the programme.
- Some schools were disappointed, however, with the numbers of packs they received, and with the period of notice they had before the receipt of such packs. There was a strong feeling, expressed in the answers to several questions in this questionnaire and in comments made by members of the focus groups, that, in order to have the maximum impact, schools needed more notice of what they would be receiving as part of Booktime so they could build these materials into their schemes of work and lesson planning. There will probably always, however, be schools who do not read as thoroughly as others the communications they receive about such initiatives. It may be worth investigating alternative, and additional, channels of communication to schools, although in future years it is likely that schools, now they have experienced Booktime, will be more alert to its possibilities.

Pupils' enjoyment of the contents of the Booktime packs

- There had been a very positive reception of the Booktime pack by pupils, with the book itself being almost universally welcomed.
- A few teachers (very few) felt concerned about the unsuitability of the Funnybones book for the children they were teaching. This seems to have led to them not using the book, rather than to any expressions of dislike from their pupils.

Teachers' use of the Funnybones book, and the accompanying resource materials, with their classes

- The vast majority of teachers had used the book with their classes, reporting almost universally that their pupils had enjoyed the reading.
- Where teachers had not used the book, the most common response was that they planned to in the future.

- Of the accompanying materials, the big book had been positively received but other items, such as the phonics wall frieze and the CD-Rom, were less well thought of.
- There had been less use made of the activity materials supplied in the Booktime pack, although this did not seem to have been the result (for most teachers) of any dissatisfaction with these materials. Rather, lack of use was attributed to the fact that the detailed planning for that term's work had already been done and so the activities could not be used to the extent they would have liked.

Teachers' general views of the Booktime programme

- There was almost universal support for the programme from the teachers responding to this questionnaire.
- Some teachers thought that the logistics of Booktime could be improved, especially in terms of the prior notice they were given of the scheme.
- Some teachers suggested improvements to the scheme, including the injection of an EAL element (which is already offered, although several schools had not picked up on this) and the provision of electronic resources to accompany the paper-based materials they had been given.

D. Other evaluation evidence

Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation carried out by Hope Stone Research were to find out from parents and carers:

- How often and how much they read with their reception year children.
- The impact of the Booktime programme on family reading.
- Their opinions about the Booktime programme and the *Funnybones* book.

It also aimed to get feedback from local library services on:

- The overall aims of the Booktime programme.
- The logistics of distribution and delivery.
- The Booktime support materials and resources.
- How the programme dovetailed in with existing reading promotion.
- Its effect on reading partnerships.

Methods

The following methods were used to gather evidence relating to the above aims.

A. Local authority and library services questionnaire survey

79 of the 151 participating library services and local authorities, acting as coordinators in the onward delivery of the programme to the schools in their area, responded to an emailed questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent out by email in December 2007 with responses returned during December 2007 and January 2008.

B. Parent/carers questionnaire survey

340 schools were randomly selected from those participating in Booktime. Questionnaires were distributed during March 2008 to parents/carers of reception class children in these schools. 1,409 questionnaires were returned from 132 schools between March and May 2008.

Findings

A. Local authority and library service survey

- Virtually all respondents supported the programme and felt its aims were clearly communicated. Most (90%) were also happy to support it in the way they were asked.
- While 72% of respondents thought delivery to schools via the LA's central distribution point was appropriate, 23% were unhappy with this arrangement. Their disquiet centred on concerns over the timing, cost and notice given of delivery.

- There was a very high level of satisfaction with the suitability and quality of the Booktime materials and resources. Particularly appreciated were those aimed at children such as bookmarks, stickers etc. Where improvements were suggested, the most common request was the provision of more such resources.
- There was almost universal agreement that Booktime had helped support and enhance the work that libraries were currently doing to promote reading for pleasure and family engagement. In addition, most (86%) felt that Booktime was helping to create or build on existing links between local authorities, library services, schools and families.
- Many respondents (65%) were not aware of schools inviting parents and carers to linked activities and events and only 27% were certain this had happened.
- Several improvements were suggested for the Booktime programme. These reflected many of the concerns around resource materials and the delivery process, and there were, for example, suggestions about longer lead in times and an alternative to the autumn launch. Other suggested improvements were funding for delivery, better labelling and greater involvement of the library service, for example, through seminars and other publicity activities, alongside greater publicity for the scheme as a whole.

B. Parent/carer questionnaire survey

- Most parents and carers claimed to read to their reception-aged child at least weekly, and over two thirds claimed to do so daily. Mothers were more likely to be frequent readers to their child although in nearly a third of households it was the father who overall claimed to read the most to their child.
- Story books were the most popular reading material. It was claimed, however, that girls had a preference for nursery rhymes and fairy tales whereas boys preferred fact books.
- While 60% of respondents claimed their child had a library card, only 38% said they visited the library with their child monthly, and only 8% weekly.
- A large majority of respondents (87%) said that they had read *Funnybones* with their child, although only 70% said that they had received the Booktime pack.
- Both parents/carers and children seemed to have enjoyed the book – three quarters of parents/carers enjoyed reading it very much, and virtually all said their child enjoyed listening to it.
- Most respondents (83%) who had read *Funnybones* to their child said they would be likely to read another book in the series.
- 16% of parents/carers said they would read more to their child as a result of the Booktime programme. This response was higher among fathers and among those who currently did not read to their child on a daily basis.

Appendix 1: The teacher questionnaire

Booktime: A Questionnaire for Reception class teachers

Thank you for taking part in Booktime this year. We would be very grateful for your views about Booktime and any ideas you have for improvements. Please could you complete this short questionnaire and return it by email to the evaluating team at d.j.wray@warwick.ac.uk, or by post to: David Wray, Institute of Education, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL. We understand the pressures on your time, but a return before Christmas would be really appreciated.

Many thanks from Booktrust and Pearson.

0. School Name: _____ County: _____

1. Please tell us about the delivery of the book and resource packs.

Please mark ONE box for EACH question using an asterisk (*):

| | | Yes | No |
|-----|---|-----|----|
| 1.a | Did you have prior notice of the packs arriving? | | |
| 1.b | Did the packs arrive at a suitable time in the school term? | | |
| 1.c | Did your school receive enough book packs for all Reception/Primary 1 pupils for the school year 2007-08? | | |

2. How much did your pupils enjoy receiving the following items to keep?

Please mark ONE box for EACH question using an asterisk (*):

| | | Very much | Quite enjoyed | Not much | Not at all | I haven't given these out yet |
|-----|----------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------|------------|-------------------------------|
| 2.a | <i>The Funnybones</i> book | | | | | |
| 2.b | The book plates | | | | | |
| 2.c | The bookmarks | | | | | |
| 2.d | The stickers | | | | | |
| 2.e | The badges | | | | | |

3. Please tell us whether you used the book *Funnybones* in class.

Please mark ONE box for EACH question using an asterisk (*):

| | | Yes | No |
|-----|--|-----|----|
| 3.a | Have you read the book <i>Funnybones</i> with your pupils? | | |
| 3.b | If you have, did your pupils enjoy the reading? | | |
| 3.c | If you have not read the book, do you plan to? | | |

4. If you have NOT used the book *Funnybones* in class, please tell us why not. Please mark with an asterisk (*) ALL the options which apply:

| | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 4.a | I did not think this book was appropriate for my class. | |
| 4.b | I have not had the time. | |
| 4.c | Another reason (please write in the box below) | |
| | | |

5. How useful were the classroom/library resource pack materials?
Please mark ONE box for EACH question using an asterisk (*):

| | | Very Useful | Quite Useful | Not very useful | Not at all useful | I haven't used this yet |
|-----|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 5.a | Big Book | | | | | |
| 5.b | Phonics wall frieze | | | | | |
| 5.c | <i>Funnybones</i> poster | | | | | |
| 5.d | CD-ROM film | | | | | |
| 5.e | Teacher stickers | | | | | |

6. Did you use any of the following activity materials?
Please mark ONE box for EACH question using an asterisk (*):

| | Activity | Yes | No |
|-----|---------------|-----|----|
| 6.a | Skeleton maze | | |

| | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|--|
| 6.b | Building a skeleton | | |
| 6.c | Make a Funnybones mask | | |
| 6.d | Which animal | | |
| 6.e | Who is in the bin? | | |
| 6.f | On your way to school | | |
| 6.g | Make a moving dog skeleton | | |
| 6.h | Spot the difference | | |
| 6.i | Finger puppets | | |
| 6.j | Picture story | | |
| 6.k | Funnybones collage | | |
| 6.l | Design a Funnybones car | | |
| 6.m | Create your own story | | |
| 6.n | Skeleton silly walks rhymes | | |
| 6.o | Funnybones song | | |

7. If you have any comments or suggestions about the activity materials please write them here:

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

8. How useful do you think the 'Reading with your Child' booklet is for parents and carers? Please mark ONE box only using an asterisk (*):

| Very Useful | Not sure | Not useful |
|-------------|----------|------------|
| | | |

Appendix 2

Full questionnaire results

Question 1: Please tell us about the delivery of the book and resources packs

Q1a: Did you have prior notice of the packs arriving?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 265 | 57.0 |
| No | 186 | 40.0 |
| Total | 451 | 97.0 |

Q1b: Did the packs arrive at a suitable time in the school term?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 441 | 94.8 |
| No | 19 | 4.1 |
| Total | 460 | 98.9 |

Q1c: Did your school receive enough book packs for all Reception/Primary 1 pupils for the school year 2007-08?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 374 | 80.4 |
| No | 82 | 17.6 |
| Total | 456 | 98.1 |

Question 2: How much did your pupils enjoy receiving the following items to keep?

Q2a: The Funnybones book

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very much | 419 | 90.1 |
| Quite enjoyed | 28 | 6.0 |
| Not much | 0 | 0 |
| Not at all | 3 | 0.6 |
| I haven't given these out yet | 13 | 2.8 |
| Total | 463 | 99.6 |

Q2b: The book plates

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very much | 185 | 39.8 |
| Quite enjoyed | 155 | 33.3 |
| Not much | 51 | 11.0 |
| Not at all | 3 | 0.6 |
| I haven't given these out yet | 45 | 9.7 |
| Total | 439 | 94.4 |

Q2c: The bookmarks

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very much | 226 | 48.6 |
| Quite enjoyed | 162 | 34.8 |
| Not much | 28 | 6.0 |
| Not at all | 3 | 0.6 |
| I haven't given these out yet | 38 | 8.2 |
| Total | 457 | 98.3 |

Q2d: The stickers

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very much | 399 | 85.8 |
| Quite enjoyed | 24 | 5.2 |
| Not much | 0 | 0 |
| Not at all | 3 | 0.6 |
| I haven't given these out yet | 31 | 6.7 |
| Total | 457 | 98.3 |

Q2e: The badges

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very much | 347 | 74.6 |
| Quite enjoyed | 53 | 11.4 |
| Not much | 3 | 0.6 |
| Not at all | 3 | 0.6 |
| I haven't given these out yet | 45 | 9.7 |
| Total | 451 | 97.0 |

Question 3: Please tell us whether you used the book *Funnybones* in class.

Q3a: Have you read the book *Funnybones* with your pupils?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 412 | 88.6 |
| No | 47 | 10.1 |
| Total | 459 | 98.7 |

Q3b: If you have, did your pupils enjoy the reading?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 405 | 87.1 |
| No | 20 | 4.3 |
| Total | 425 | 91.4 |

Q3c: If you have not read the book, do you plan to?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 36 | 7.7 |
| No | 9 | 1.9 |
| Total | 45 | 9.7 |

Question 4: If you have NOT used the book *Funnybones* in class, please tell us why not.

Q4a: I did not think this book was appropriate for my class.

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Agree | 5 | 1.1 |

Q4b I have not had the time.

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Agree | 3 | .6 |

Question 5: How useful were the classroom/library resource pack materials?

Q5A: Big book

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very useful | 379 | 81.5 |
| Quite useful | 24 | 5.2 |
| Not very useful | 0 | 0 |
| Not at all useful | 3 | .6 |
| I haven't used this yet | 31 | 6.7 |
| Total | 437 | 94.0 |

Q5b: Phonics wall frieze

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very useful | 170 | 36.6 |
| Quite useful | 141 | 30.3 |
| Not very useful | 49 | 10.5 |
| Not at all useful | 14 | 3.0 |
| I haven't used this yet | 62 | 13.3 |
| Total | 436 | 93.8 |

Q5c: Funnybones poster

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very useful | 173 | 37.2 |
| Quite useful | 180 | 38.7 |
| Not very useful | 48 | 10.3 |
| Not at all useful | 5 | 1.1 |
| I haven't used this yet | 30 | 6.5 |
| Total | 436 | 93.8 |

Q5d: CD-Rom film

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very useful | 92 | 19.8 |
| Quite useful | 81 | 17.4 |
| Not very useful | 22 | 4.7 |
| Not at all useful | 2 | .4 |
| I haven't used this yet | 197 | 42.4 |
| Total | 394 | 84.7 |

Q5e: Teacher stickers

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very useful | 203 | 43.7 |
| Quite useful | 135 | 29.0 |
| Not very useful | 17 | 3.7 |
| Not at all useful | 3 | .6 |
| I haven't used this yet | 67 | 14.4 |
| Total | 425 | 91.4 |

Question 6: Did you use any of the following activity materials?

Q6a: Skeleton maze

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 143 | 30.8 |
| No | 208 | 44.7 |
| Total | 351 | 75.5 |

Q6b: Building a skeleton

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 173 | 37.2 |
| No | 183 | 39.4 |
| Total | 356 | 76.6 |

Q6c: Make a Funnybones mask

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 157 | 33.8 |
| No | 196 | 42.2 |
| Total | 353 | 75.9 |

Q6d: Which animal

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 125 | 26.9 |
| No | 199 | 42.8 |
| Total | 324 | 69.7 |

Q6e: Who is in the bin?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 98 | 21.1 |
| No | 234 | 50.3 |
| Total | 332 | 71.4 |

Q6f: On your way to school

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 83 | 17.8 |
| No | 230 | 49.5 |
| Total | 313 | 67.3 |

Q6g: Make a moving dog skeleton

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 118 | 25.4 |
| No | 212 | 45.6 |
| Total | 330 | 71.0 |

Q6h: Spot the difference

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 156 | 33.5 |
| No | 182 | 39.1 |
| Total | 338 | 72.7 |

Q6i: Finger puppets

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 144 | 31.0 |
| No | 188 | 40.4 |
| Total | 332 | 71.4 |

Q6j: Picture story

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 180 | 38.7 |
| No | 163 | 35.1 |
| Total | 343 | 73.8 |

Q6k: Funnybones collage

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 76 | 16.3 |
| No | 245 | 52.7 |
| Total | 321 | 69.0 |

Q6l: Design a Funnybones car

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 36 | 7.7 |
| No | 277 | 59.6 |
| Total | 313 | 67.3 |

Q6m: Create your own story

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 95 | 20.4 |
| No | 227 | 48.8 |
| Total | 322 | 69.2 |

Q6n: Skeleton silly walks rhymes

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 93 | 20.0 |
| No | 234 | 50.3 |
| Total | 327 | 70.3 |

Q6o: Funnybones song

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 195 | 41.9 |
| No | 151 | 32.5 |
| Total | 346 | 74.4 |

Question 8: How useful do you think the 'Reading with your Child' booklet is for parents and carers?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Very useful | 343 | 73.8 |
| Not sure | 104 | 22.4 |
| Not useful | 3 | .6 |
| Total | 450 | 96.8 |

Q9a: Did you organise a visit to your local public library linked to Booktime?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 37 | 8.0 |
| No | 411 | 88.4 |
| Total | 448 | 96.3 |

Q9b: Did you invite parents and carers into your school for any activities or events linked to Booktime?

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 68 | 14.6 |
| No | 385 | 82.8 |
| Total | 453 | 97.4 |

Question 10: What do you think about the Booktime project?

Q10a: The purpose of Booktime is clear

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Strongly agree | 195 | 41.9 |
| Agree | 240 | 51.6 |
| Disagree | 10 | 2.2 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Don't know | 10 | 2.2 |
| Total | 455 | 97.8 |

Q10b: Booktime is a valuable project

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Strongly agree | 291 | 62.6 |
| Agree | 157 | 33.8 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 3 | .6 |
| Don't know | 4 | .9 |
| Total | 455 | 97.8 |

Q10c: I am happy to support Booktime

| | Number responding | % of total respondents |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Strongly agree | 279 | 60.0 |
| Agree | 165 | 35.5 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0 |
| Don't know | 9 | 1.9 |
| Total | 453 | 97.4 |