

Multi-Cultural Family Base

4-2-7



Project

**Evaluation of a pilot group work programme for
5/6 year old children in school setting**

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4-2-7 Evaluation

Background information on the group

MCFB received funding from the Fairer Scotland Innovation Fund to develop the agency's 4-2-7 Project. It was decided to start a pilot group in a primary school with six children. This group would run for 10 sessions. It was intended that this group would help the agency develop a model for future group work with children of this age and could form the basis for further funding applications. It was decided to target two primary schools in the north of Edinburgh, as these schools had worked with MCFB in the past and had identified some children who would benefit from group work interventions. Further discussions with head teachers, teachers and EAL (English as an Additional Language) staff led to six children being referred to the group (three from each school). One of the schools was also able to provide a suitable room for the group to take place. In one of the schools we were able to meet three of the children's mothers (all Polish) and making use of an EAL bilingual support assistant explain the purpose of the group, obtain some background family information on the children and gain the parents consent to their child's attendance at the group. In the other school it was more difficult to set up these face-to-face meetings with parents-this was partly due to time constraints. A translated letter was sent out to these parents, explaining the purpose of the group with a return slip with their permission for their child to attend the group. The teachers at the school also spoke to the parents about the group, although some language barriers militated against this communication.

The group started on a twice weekly basis as it was felt that this would help the children to make a better connection with the group. The group ran on this basis for the first three weeks and then moved to a once weekly slot. The group was facilitated by Steve Gowenlock (Service and Learning Manager at MCFB) and two social work students Lucy Dawson and Elise Barr. Elise finished her placement at the half way point of the group and another student Laura Renwick worked with the group for the remainder of the sessions.

The group work model evolved as the sessions progressed. It was based on opportunities for circle time, storytelling and different play activities. We tried to encourage the use of language and cooperative play through familiar structures and new play opportunities. We decided to increase the number of sessions in the programme as the children requested this and it was felt that they would benefit from more time in the group.

Background information on the children referred to the group

The following six children were referred to the group by the two schools.
All names have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality.

Mareck:

Mareck is a 6 year old Polish boy who is in primary two. The school were concerned that he was struggling to manage the school curriculum. He tended to shout out in class and at times seemed distressed. His mother told us that she was concerned for him, as he had been affected by a recent parental separation following domestic violence from her husband. Mareck had moved house several times during this period and this appeared to have had a negative impact on him.

Tomek:

Tomek is a five year old Polish boy in primary one. The school felt that in general that he was settling in reasonably well, although he could benefit from some work to build his confidence in his spoken English. He tended to form a pairing with Syzmon in class and in the playground and his teacher felt that this was possibly detrimental for Tomek's own progress in school.

Syzmon:

Syzmon is a five year old Polish boy in primary one. His teacher noted that Syzmon had missed a lot of nursery education and felt that his mother had possibly been "over-protective" and kept him home unnecessarily. His teacher commented that Syzmon did not have a lot of confidence in speaking English, rarely spoke in class and appeared young for his age. It was felt that Syzmon had become over dependant on Tomek and this pairing prevented him from finding his own voice in class.

Bartek:

Bartek is a five year old Polish boy in primary one. Bartek had joined the school two months into the term after a difficult start at another school where his parents were concerned that he was subject to bullying. His teachers were concerned about some of Bartek's "strange" behaviour in class- repetitive noises, rolling around on the floor. There were some concerns that there might be a level of underlying learning difficulties. Bartek appeared to find it difficult to make good peer relationships with others in his class.

Korfa:

Korfa is a five year old North African Muslim boy in primary one. His first language is Arabic. He was very withdrawn in class and the playground and did not appear to have any friendships with his peers. He struggled to contribute in class and to manage the school curriculum. There had been some difficulties in the communication between home and school, and according to the school his mother did not appear to understand some of the requirements for pupils in primary one.

Saadia:

Saadia is a five year old North African Muslim girl in primary one. Her first language is Arabic. She was very quiet in class and did not contribute to class discussions. She did not appear to have a lot of confidence in her spoken English.

Broad Aim/ Desired Outcome

The broad aims of the group were to promote the cognitive, language, social and emotional development of the participants and to promote their overall resilience. We also aimed to reduce participants' social isolation by promoting their ability to initiate and sustain friendships. Overall, we hoped to help the children to better manage the transition to primary education and to help them to achieve their full potential within the school setting in the long-term.

Objectives

- To promote the development of the children's social skills including their ability to turn-take, share, resolve conflict, express their feelings appropriately, cooperate and communicate appropriately with others.
- To increase the children's self-esteem and self-confidence.
- To help the children to develop problem solving skills, to express and understand their emotions and to gain control over their behaviour.
- To promote the children's English language skills to enable them to communicate more effectively with teachers and peers and to express themselves verbally in English.
- To promote improvements in the children's academic ability.
- To increase the children's capacities to play cooperatively and to make use of a range of play materials and activities.
- To help the children to communicate more effectively non-verbally using eye contact and body language.

Indicators of change

If the children were beginning to achieve aims and objectives, we expected to see the following:

- They would develop and sustain friendships within the group.
- They would develop and sustain more friendships at school.

- They would demonstrate the aforementioned social skills in their interactions with children within the group and with peers at school.
- They would be able to manage in the group setting.
- They would become increasingly able to express themselves in English, understand instruction and respond to questions, which would be evident within the group and at school.
- The children would put their hands up more in class to volunteer answers to questions.
- There would be improvements in the children's academic ability, which would be evident in relation to their literacy and numeracy.
- The children would be playing more cooperatively and would be able to better sustain their involvement in play and to try out and experiment with new play materials.
- The children would begin to assert themselves more and would give each other feedback on their behaviour.

Recording/Measurements

In order to assess change and progression, we used several methods of data collection, which were as follows:

- **Observations:** we observed the children's behaviour within the group, looking out for indications of the achievement of aims and objectives and discussed and recorded our observations during post-session evaluation meetings. These recordings were later used to assess the children's progress.
- **Meetings with teachers:** we met with head teachers, class teachers and EAL teachers towards the end of the group to find out if they had observed any positive changes in participants that would suggest their achievement of aims and objectives.
- **Meetings with parents:** we also met with parents towards the end of the group to find out if they had observed any positive changes in participants that would suggest their achievement of aims and objectives.
- **Feedback from children:** we sought feedback from the children on their feelings about being involved in the group on an ongoing basis. We also devised a questionnaire, which was administered both at the midpoint and the end of the group, to find out their feelings about participation, their perceptions of how the group had helped them and their suggestions for ways that it could be improved.

The 4-2-7 Program

Session 1

- Explanation of group – aims, objectives etc.
- Name game
- Play-Doh – free play
- Feedback circle – what has each child particularly enjoyed about the session and what would they like to do next time.

Session 2

- Name game
- Gluing various cut-out shapes and textures to large animal stencils as a group
- Lego
- Feedback circle

Session 3

- Name game
- Free play with sand tray and animals, Lego and K'Nex, drawing and colouring
- Feedback circle

Session 4

- Name game
- Painting large animal cut-outs as a group
- Feedback circle

Session 5

- Name game
- Sponge painting and gluing junk material
- Feedback circle

Session 6

- Name game
- Puppet-making
- Feedback circle

Session 7

- Name game
- Endings-student leaving,
- puppet-making
- Feedback circle

Session 8

- Name game
- Endings
- Story-'Where the Wild Things are..'
- Play-Doh
- Feedback circle

Session 9

- Name game
- Introductions
- Story-‘The Bear Hunt/The Gruffalo’
- Den-role play, child took on the role of a significant adult in their life
- Play-Doh
- Feedback circle

Session 10

- Name game
- Story-‘The Gruffalo’
- Gluck-tactile water based activity
- Feedback circle

Session 11

- Name game
- Story – ‘The Little Monster Did It’
- Jigsaws, painting
- Feedback circle

Session 12

- Name game
- Story-“The Selfish Crocodile”
- Cake/biscuit decorating
- Feedback circle

Session 13

- Name game
- Story-‘The Hungry Caterpillar’
- Choice of activities-‘Guess Who?’, ‘Box of Feelings’, Dolls House, Lego
- Feedback circle

Session 14

- Name game
- Story-‘Willy’s Wobbly House’
- Gluing, Play mobile
- Feedback circle

Session 15

- Name game
- Story-“The Easter Duck”
- Easter card making
- Hide and seek game
- Feedback circle

Session 16

- Outdoor session
- Free play in park
- Games – Duck, Duck, Goose and What’s the time Mr Wolf
- Endings discussion

Session 17

- Name Game
- Story-Emma's Lamb
- Cake Decoration
- Endings discussion

Throughout all of the sessions there has been a visual display for the children to see how many sessions they have left. Each child has physically put a tick onto the chart in order to prepare them for an ending. Also to support this each week time was spent counting how many sessions were left.

How effective was the group?

In all the children we were able to see evidence of all the indicators of change. We used three main methods of data collection (observations of the children in the group, feedback from the children and feedback from teachers). It proved difficult to gain feedback from the children's parents, perhaps for a variety of reasons. A meeting was set up with three of the parents from one school with arrangements for a Polish bilingual teaching assistant to be in attendance for interpretation purposes. However, the parents declined to attend this session. It was more problematic to set up a meeting with the parents of the children at the other school , perhaps due to language difficulties, time constraints on teachers and more complicated relationships between these parents and the school. We have summarised some of the gains for each of the different children as follows:

Mareck

Mareck reported that he had enjoyed the group, in particular he liked the opportunities to try out new play activities ("sticky hands"-gluck). This was confirmed by his teacher who noted that Mareck was full of enthusiasm for the group. In the group Mareck did talk to one worker about his father "hitting" his mother and commented that his father lived in another house. He was able to develop his ability to talk about some of his feelings and we worked on his tendency to shout out over other children.

Tomek

Tomek said that he enjoyed the group ("I would like it to go on for 100 times"). His teacher noted that he talked positively about the group and was always keen to go to the group. Both his school and we noticed that the group had helped separate Szymon from his dependence on Tomek, which had been beneficial for Tomek. His teachers noted that Tomek's confidence in contributing to class discussions had increased, although his teacher did comment that she felt Tomek was becoming slightly cheekier to adults.

Szymon

There appeared to have been real benefits for Szymon from his attendance at the group. Both school and MCFB noted that he was much more confident in

his use of spoken English. Towards the end of the group he would initiate conversations both with adults and other children. He had moved from his initial over dependence on Tomek and had formed attachments to other children and to the workers in the group. His EAL teacher noted that he was much more able to contribute to small group discussions within school. His initial presentation was of somebody younger than his age (he often made “baby noises” in the group) and he appeared to have difficulties with eczema on his face and arms. Both of these changed over the course of the group in that his body language and non-verbal presentation was much stronger and appeared more appropriate for his age. It would , of course, be difficult to prove that the diminution of his eczema was attributable to the group, but as it can be a stress related condition a growing self confidence might have played some part in this change.

Bartek

Bartek appeared to have benefitted from the group on different levels. There were benefits for him but also the group had helped furnish a clearer assessment of Bartek’s needs and abilities. His teacher had noted that Bartek’s use of English had improved- he had moved away from the use of repetitive words to constructing whole sentences. They were also pleased with the increases in Bartek’s level of confidence. He was always happy to go to the group and keen to share with his peers what he had been doing when he returned. In many ways his participation in the group had given him a new status amongst his classroom peers. We noticed big changes in Bartek’s ability to listen, concentrate and focus on activities. The school were now clear that Bartek did not have learning difficulties and that he knows a lot more than we had first thought. They felt that they could now attribute some of his “strange behaviour” to his frustrations at not being able to communicate effectively in English and possibly to the change in schools in the first term of primary one.

Korfa

There appeared to have been real benefits for Korfa derived from his attendance at the group. His levels of confidence, communication and social skills have all developed (worker’s observations and feedback from teachers). His teacher commented that Korfa, “did not have any friends before but now his friendship with Saadia has opened up the possibility of him becoming friends with her peer group”. We noticed that he had moved from his initial dependence on Saadia to becoming friendly with Bartek and Szymon. His teacher commented that Korfa was “speaking more” and “not isolating himself”. We noticed that Korfa had moved from being silent or monosyllabic in his responses to speaking in whole sentences and initiating conversations. At the start of the group programme Korfa used to roll his eyes and disengage from adults when asked anything. This behaviour trait disappeared at the half way point of the group.

Saadia

Saadia appeared to have made some positive gains from her participation in the group. Her teacher commented that her sentence construction had come on and that her overall language had developed. They felt that she had

“enjoyed taking Korfa under her wing”. We felt that Saadia had attached herself and enjoyed the relationships with adults in the group (at the last session she appeared sad that the group was coming to an end and thanked the adults for the group). She had enjoyed the opportunity to try out new art and craft activities and was very focused on activities such as gluing and collage work. Initially Saadia, as the only girl in the group, was quiet but over the course of the group work programme she became a strong presence in the group. She was often one of the first to voice her views and had clear ideas about what activities she would like to participate in.

On balance all of the children appeared to have made some gains from their participation in the group, although possibly Szymon, Bartek, Korfa and Saadia had gained the most obvious benefits. Our own observations and evaluations in this respect were backed up by similar views from the children’s teachers.

Recommendations for future groups

In running another group in the future we would look at the following points:

- We would try to build in more planning time so that we could make more meaningful contact with parents, both before and after the group programme.
- We would consider making use of other evaluation tools such as the Goodman’s strengths and difficulties scale and school attainment levels.
- We would aim to use the same programme, but start off with 15 sessions. We would possibly extend the length of each session from 50 minutes to one hour. We would hope to have a more diverse gender and ethnic mix within the group.
- We would try to maintain the same continuity of staffing throughout group, as we noticed that the children did find it very difficult when one worker (social work student) left half way through the group work programme.