

Case Study: Lucy Chambers, BAHons; DipLib; MSc; MCLIP

Fathers Reading Week

Lucy Chambers is a Chartered Librarian. She managed primary school libraries for over 20 years, latterly for Tower Hamlets Schools Library Services, London, before retiring in 2018. One of the school libraries she managed was an inner-city school with high levels of social deprivation, mainly EAL pupils of Bangladeshi heritage, with an above national average with special educational needs. Lucy worked at the school one day a week from 2012 to 2015; the case study has been anonymised as she no longer works at the school.

The school's senior staff priorities were:

- To improve reading in the school. The latest Ofsted report stated that: *"The proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard by the end of Year 6 was below the national average and well below at the higher levels."*
- To develop family involvement. Research showed this improved pupils' uptake of education (see the Reference section below).
- To encourage participation by fathers/male role models in their children's education.

In order to meet these priorities, the school's Family Support Worker (FSW) and Lucy planned a Fathers Reading Week in June. They held three meetings and shared tasks: Lucy concentrated on sourcing resources, setting up events, negotiating with the Head, booking and running the author visit and cinema night; she handled the day-to-day school contact, timetabling issues, finding volunteers for the after-school events, spoke about the project at a staff meeting and encouraged families to take part.

The Reading Week offered something for every class, from Nursery to Year 6, with the following events - the asterisked ones were held for the first time in the school:

- Storyteller Pat Ryan: undertook a storytelling assembly with the whole school, Rhymetime with Reception, Years 1 and 2; and writing workshops with Years 3 to 6.
- *Fathers shared stories in class in drop-in session; children throughout the whole school wrote and drew their favourite stories.
- *Father/child homework was encouraged throughout the whole school with fathers reading to children/ sharing stories about their school days/ childhoods.
- *Father/child football-based writing and creative activities homework for pupils aged 6 to 11 years was also undertaken.
- There were timetabled reading opportunities in class: Lucy borrowed 40 books for each class from the Schools Library Service including: football stories, non-fiction, traditional tales, and father/child stories.
- *Children "dressing-up as their fathers" day.
- Family assembly.
- *Whole school competition: portraits by children of their father.
- *Display in playground for families of father portraits.
- *Cinema night for Years 3 – 6.
- *Cricket match: Fathers v school cricket team.

The budget for the Fathers Reading Week was £300, which covered the storyteller and prizes. Everything else was free of cost.

REFERENCES

Research from The Fatherhood Institute and the National Literacy Trust (NLT) reflected school issues.

"Fathers who are involved in their children's early education have a significant impact on attainment and on future aspiration. ... Conversely, low interest by fathers in their children's education (particularly boys) has a stronger negative impact on their achievement than contact with the police, poverty, family type, social class, housing tenure and child's personality."

- Blanden, J. (2006). 'Bucking the trend': What enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed later in life? *Working Paper No 31 Corporate Document Services*. London: Department for Work and Pensions

Christina Clark and Irene Picton found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to get encouragement to read and to see their parents read, particularly their fathers, and that children whose parents encourage them to read and are seen reading themselves achieve higher reading levels at school.

- Clark and Picton (2012) *Family Matters: The Importance of Family Support for Young People's Reading*, National Literacy Trust.

The most popular events were:

- Film night: 70 children attended.
- Playground display: c. 30 families and many fathers attended.
- Teachers were very pleased with attendance at the fathers' drop-in storytelling, particularly in EY. Fathers with no spoken English shared stories in their mother tongue; fathers enjoyed listening to other fathers telling stories; staff said this was a valuable experience and should be expanded to include mothers too.

- Very positive comments from staff about Pat Ryan: "Excellent, great at communication with all ages" (a teacher); "all stories based round father/child relationship" (a teacher); "great to have a male literary role model" (Literacy Coordinator).
- Children were very enthusiastic about the father/child homework.
- Cricket match: Dads, brothers and grandparents took part; this received very positive reactions.

There were some issues that would need to be addressed if the school decided to run the event again. Many staff were reluctant to change their routines or volunteer after school, and a lack of staff enthusiasm and marketing to the classes meant that take-up of some activities was quite low, eg the fancy dress, so staff engagement and participate is crucial. More fathers dropped in for storytelling in the younger classes than in the older ones. Some children were in tears if their parent didn't arrive; the FSW identified children with no father living at home in advance and discussed the options of inviting another male role model to take part. Lucy also felt that if she were to run this event again, she would collate more comments and data via evaluative questionnaires for families, staff and children.

LEGACY

- Lucy judged Fathers Reading Week a success to build on.
- She established one family event per term (in addition to other regular reading for pleasure initiatives for pupils, such as clubs, shadowing book awards, entering competitions, displays etc.):
 - October: National Poetry Day (Poetry sharing for families and display of staff favourite poems around the school);

- March: Book Week around World Book Day;
- June: family after-school reading event sharing myths and other stories, with resources borrowed from the SLS.
- The FSW working with the families of the children lacking fathers/male role models flagged up this situation.
- Staff were keen to include mothers in a school literacy event: eg a Mothers Day reading week.
- Staff invited parents to read with children in class regularly after the event.
- The Literacy Coordinator included library events in her annual planning; Lucy worked more closely on involving the whole school and community in reading development events.

TIPS

- Library projects should be included in annual school planning and supported by the SMT in order to ensure full staff participation.
- Thank everybody who helped you, to encourage willing participation in the future.
- It is very useful to work on projects like this with a member of staff who comes at it from a different angle and is full-time, as it helps to integrate the project in the life of the school.