



# Literacy, Learning and Linkages: A process evaluation of the Doodle Families Programme

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## Acronyms

<b>CDI</b>	Childhood Development Initiative (Tallaght West)
<b>DD</b>	Doodle Den
<b>DF</b>	Doodle Families
<b>DCU</b>	Dublin City University
<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality in Schools
<b>HSCCL</b>	Home School Community Liaison
<b>NCCA</b>	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
<b>SCP</b>	School Completion Project

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Doodle Families was developed as a response to requests from schools who wanted a follow up programme to Doodle Den, the Childhood Development Initiative's (CDI) after-school programme for Senior Infant Children, which has been consistently found to improve children's literacy.

The Doodle Families Literacy Programme was delivered on a pilot basis during the period September–November 2017 in Dublin and Limerick. Six DEIS Band 1 primary schools participated, three in Dublin, three in Limerick. The programme was designed for children in First Class and their parents.

Doodle Families took place over eight weeks, with parents and children participating in one session per week. The parents' session always preceded the children's session. The objectives of the Doodle Families Programme as outlined in the CDI Logic Model (CDI, 2016) and the CDI Doodle Families Manual (2017) were:

- **Increased effectiveness** of school and community agencies working with families to develop children's literacy;
- **Increased parental awareness** and skills to practice effective family literacy activities with their children;
- **Increased parental knowledge** of how best to support their children's school learning at home;
- Improved home-school relations between parents and teachers;
- **Sustained and improved outcomes for children** in First Class including: Oral, written and digital literacy skills
  - Regular school attendance
  - Positive relationships with family and peers
  - Positive engagement in learning (CDI, 2017: 3)

The aim of this evaluation of Doodle Families was to assess the implementation of the programme, how it was delivered and how those involved in the delivery felt about the programme, including the programme facilitators, parents, children, and school principals.

The evaluation was primarily a process evaluation which used both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine in detail how the implementation of the **Doodle Families Programme** was delivered, the nature and extent of the supports required to facilitate high quality delivery and key stakeholders' perspectives on how they experienced the programme.

Data was collected through different methods including questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Multiple types of triangulation were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the

research data. In order to answer the research questions, the data findings were organised under the headings of *utilisation*, *organisation* and *fidelity* to the Doodle Families Programme.

The key findings were as follows:

**Utilisation:** Did the parents and children utilise the programme and if so, to what extent?

- Six DEIS Band 1 schools (three in Limerick, three in Dublin) took part; 12 facilitators participated; all attended one days' training.
- There was a wide variability of experience amongst the facilitators ranging from experienced teachers to community and adult educators (School Completion personnel, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) personnel).
- Thirty-two parents and children in Dublin participated, thirty-four in Limerick. All the children were in First Class. The parents' session generally took place in the parents' room, or library/resource room. The children's sessions took place in a classroom separate to the child's class.
- Attendance at the sessions by both parents and the children was reported by the facilitators to be consistently very high. Quantitative data on attendance was not recorded by the researchers.
- The period of eight weeks was considered too short to effect substantial change in pupils' literacy levels, but was considered long enough to engage parents in the literacy support strategies.
- Facilitators and some parents advised that the programme be extended to run for a longer period.

Children engaged enthusiastically with the programme – they responded positively to the engaging and fun literacy activities provided by the weekly sessions and were provided with an opportunity to share literacy activities with their parents through the Doodle Diary.

**Organisation:** To what extent did the organisation of the Doodle Families Programme work to support maximum engagement by participants and facilitators?

- The training day was attended by 14 facilitators and the key aspects of the Doodle Families Programme were explained and examples of activities were given. There is a need to differentiate training for facilitators who were not primary school teachers – such as practitioners working in the School Completion Programme.

- All materials, manuals and online resources required for rolling out the programme should be printed and available for the facilitators in advance of the Training Day. More time during the training day to explore the materials provided by the trainer is advised.
- Some facilitators reported that the Doodle Families children's lessons were 'content heavy' with too much content specified for the time allotted.
- School Principals reported the critical role played by the HSCL teacher in coordinating the Doodle Families Programme in the school.
- After school was considered to be a suitable time for the children's sessions.

**Fidelity:** Did the facilitators adhere to the Doodle Families manual?

- There was evidence that the facilitators planned each lesson according to the Doodle Families Manual and selected activities which were appropriate to the level of the children.
- Changes and adaptations made to some lessons were observed by the researchers. However, differentiation of content was observed to be appropriate.
- There was evidence that the parents' sessions were shortened in some groups (3), and the recommended time was not adhered to in all sessions. Facilitators suggested they made a judgement call based on the varying levels of engagement among the parents in some groups.
- Some facilitators did not send home the Doodle Diary which was an integral part of the parent-child interaction recommended in the Doodle Families manual.
- Facilitators who were familiar with the English language curriculum (DES, 2011) were able to use the parents' sessions to share with parents and explain the schools' approach to teaching reading and writing. Parents reported this to be very valuable.

**The findings** indicate that:

- The wide diversity of experience among the facilitators – which included primary and post primary school teachers, Home School Liaison and School Completion personnel suggest that the training needs of the facilitators must be identified early on and the training adapted as appropriate for Doodle Families.
- The diversity among parents, even in similar urban socio

economic groups, presented a challenge to the facilitators. Despite their positive support for family literacy programmes in general, the practical issues with regard to implementation of the Doodle Families Programme over a short eight-week period, made additional demands on them.

- Fidelity to the lesson content and objectives as outlined in the Doodle Families Manual and the timing of the sessions must be adhered to if the aims and objectives of the overall programme are to be addressed.
- The video content was for the most part suitable, however, some video content, as observed, was too complex for parents and facilitators reported that they found it difficult to sustain their interest.
- The Doodle Families programme was enthusiastically received by the parents and children who participated and served as an opportunity for children to enjoy fun with literacy activities and also share this with their parents.
- The engagement of parents in the programme was positively reported by the school principals and the facilitators.
- Fidelity to the Manual with respect to the reduced time allocated to parents session, needs to be addressed.
- In addition, the decision by some facilitators not to send the Doodle Diaries home resulted in an inequity regarding what the parents received to support them in engaging and discussing their child's Doodle Family session content.

Key recommendations include the following:

- A reduction in the content of the session format to allow for greater in-depth engagement with the content.
- Checking of all videos and links prior to the session to ensure suitability for the cohort of parent participants.
- All materials and resources, including the Doodle Families portal to be populated and available prior to the programme commencement date.
- A follow up study with the parents and children to examine the long term impact of the Doodle Families Programme on parent/child engagement in family literacy activities.
- Knowledge of the Doodle Families Programme to be made available to the class teacher together with access to the materials and resources.
- The use of texting to stay connected to parents and to encourage engagement at home.



## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### 1.1 Background to Doodle Families Programme

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) provides community led interventions to strengthen the links between home and school and to increase parental involvement (CDI, 2015). Doodle Den was developed by CDI to improve children's literacy, school attendance and overall to enhance their relationship and engagement with learning. Doodle Den is an after-school programme that was designed to promote young children's literacy in Tallaght West (Dublin). It was found to be an effective after-school literacy programme and an evaluation showed improvements as judged by the literacy scores on standardised reading tests as well as teachers' assessment of the children's literacy ability (Biggart et al., 2012). It was recommended that CDI should be encouraged to develop, disseminate and promote the expansion of the programme.

A follow up or 'booster' programme, Doodle Families was subsequently developed by CDI. This was delivered on a pilot basis in three DEIS Band 1 primary schools in Limerick during the period April to June 2015 for First Class children and their parents. Doodle Families was originally designed as an afterschool programme, (similar to Doodle Den) but the pilot schools delivered it during the school day or bridging the school day and afterschool time. Doodle Families was delivered in two four week blocks, with families participating in one session per week. A process evaluation of the Doodle Families Pilot Programme was implemented and made recommendations in relation to the timing of the sessions, revision of the manual and the training of the facilitators (Bourke & O Higgins, 2016).

Following revisions to the Doodle Families Manual, a second pilot of the Doodle Families Programme was carried out in September–October 2017. Six DEIS Band 1 primary schools participated, three in Dublin, three in Limerick. The programme

was designed for children in First Class and their parents. Doodle Families took place over eight weeks, with parents and children participating in one session per week. The parents' session always preceded the children's session. This current evaluation study aims to evaluate the revised Doodle Families Programme and to explore the programme implementation taking into consideration the recommendations previously made.

### 1.2 Programme Content

Doodle Families is an eight-week Family Literacy Programme, developed for children in First Class to support their language, literacy and social skills. Children with mixed ability were invited to participate with up to 15 children in each group. It is advised that other personnel working with the families and children in the community, e.g. Home School Community Liaison and School Completion personnel be involved in delivering the programme. The Doodle Families Programme Manual contains detailed plans for each of the parent and child sessions plus additional activity and links to the CDI portal and other useful resources. In addition, a children's Doodle Diary was designed so as to allow children to share and discuss with their parents what they had learned in their individual sessions.

The programme has two components: a weekly one hour parents/guardians' session delivered during the school day, and a weekly one hour children's session delivered after school, over a period of eight weeks.

The parent component of Doodle Families consists of eight sessions, each with a specific focus. Topics covered include learning styles, oral language development, story-telling, school experience, library services, writing, reading and learning at home. The Doodle Families Manual sets out detailed guidelines for facilitators. Each weekly session consists of the following components:



Figure 1: Weekly Session Plan, Parent Component

Session Content:	Approx. time allocation
<b>Ice-breaker/review of the previous session:</b> Each session begins with a review of the previous week and an affirmation of the work parents have done. This provides an opportunity to check in, monitor progress and answer any questions that arise. It also allows for a brief revision of the previous topic before moving on to the next topic.	15 minutes
<b>Introducing the focus topic for the week:</b> This is generally done through a discussion with the support of a video clip. The Facilitator introduces the theory behind the particular aspect of literacy and explains why it is important in the child's overall learning. Where possible this is linked back to the parent's own experiences.	20 minutes
<b>Activity based on the particular topic:</b> Once the theory has been explained, the participants move on to testing the skills out and putting them into practice with their peers before using them at home with their child. The parents will also be given a task to complete at home which relates to the activity.	15 minutes
<b>Summary:</b> The Facilitator summarises the session and answers any questions. The Facilitator also tells the parents about the content of the child session.	10 minutes

Source: *Doodle Families Manual* (p.8/9)

It is recommended that each parent's session is conducted by at least one facilitator. The parents' session always precedes the children's session, in order to introduce the topic for each week.

The children's component of the Doodle Families Programme consists of eight sessions, each with a specific focus. Topics covered include writing about themselves, listening to stories, reading with a book buddy, creating a story about a mystery person, writing a silly story, following the clues on a school

treasure hunt, visiting the library and doing activities in the Doodle Diary. Two facilitators engage with the children during the sessions. The topics covered during the children's sessions mirror the parents' session. This allows time for parents to discuss and reflect on how best to engage with the topic and with the children's activities at home. Guidelines for facilitators are outlined in the table below. Each weekly session consists of the following components:





Figure 2: Weekly Session Plan, Child Component

Session Content:	Approx. time allocation
<b>Introduction:</b> The Facilitators welcome the children, sign them in, and explain what will happen in the session.	5 minutes
<b>Cooperative Game:</b> The children play a cooperative game based on a literacy skill. This includes oral language, phonic or a sight word game. A list of games are included in the Manual or the Facilitators can select their own game.	10 minutes
<b>Book Buddies:</b> Book Buddies is a guided reading session. Each Facilitator works with half of the group separately. The children read a book together using a range of approaches selected by the Facilitator. The aim of this activity is to support children’s reading development, increase their confidence in reading and to improve fluency through reading for fun.	10 minutes
<b>Activities based on the key topic:</b> The children will complete an activity based on the core learning objective of the parent’s session. It will build on the skills the parent has learned in their session. The activities include a range of fun tasks that are linked to the school curriculum for First Class.	20 minutes
<b>Doodle Time</b> is the section of the session that focuses on writing. Children write in their Doodle Diaries about a topic based on a prompt provided by the Facilitators. The aim of this activity is to encourage children to engage in process writing, help them develop their vocabulary and to introduce creative writing and writing for fun.	10 minutes
<b>Session Summary:</b> The parents are invited in for this part of the session. The children share their work with them and select something they are proud of to show to their parents.	5 minutes

Source: *Doodle Families Manual* (p.9)

The aim of the current evaluation study is to explore the implementation of the revised Doodle Families Programme, to focus on how the Programme was delivered, and to consider the experiences of all the participants and the recommendations of previous evaluations (Biggart et al., 2012; Bourke & Higgins, 2016).



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Family Literacy Programmes

Much is written about the significant educational, social and behavioural benefits that accrue to children as a result of an effective partnership between parents and teachers. Family literacy programmes are effective in improving child literacy skills and improving parental involvement (UNESCO, 2009). The research supports a 'whole family' approach to tackling literacy and other educational challenges that disadvantaged families and communities face (Carpentieri et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2017).

In a review of 66 studies of parental participation, Henderson and Berla (1994) concluded that, "regardless of income, education level or cultural background, all families can and do contribute to their children's success," (p. 14). They also found that "the evidence is now beyond dispute that when schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed and not just in school, but throughout life," (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p.1). The research evidence indicates that family literacy interventions have a greater impact than most educational interventions (Swain, Brooks & Bosley, 2014). Closer to home, the *Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative* funded by Atlantic Philanthropies demonstrated that effective interventions can have a positive effect on the lives of children and their parents.

### 2.2 Improved academic performance

Family literacy plays a key role in children's acquisition of literacy skills and can potentially overcome the cycle of educational disadvantage by improving children's literacy skills and improving parental involvement. There is an increasing awareness and growing understanding that parental engagement in their child's education at all stages has a positive effect on their academic performance. Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement (Cotton & Reed Wikeland, 2001). The level of parental involvement in early literacy activities with their children is associated with the level of the children's literacy attainment (Senechal & LeFebvre, 2002). Furthermore, the research shows that the more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning the more beneficial are the achievement effects. It is argued that parental involvement has more of an impact on educational outcomes than any other factor, including social class or level of parental income. These improved educational outcomes do not necessarily depend on the formal literacy levels of the parents but the climate in which children are encouraged, given opportunities to read, provided with recognition of their attainments and subject to interaction and modelling of

language and daily problem solving activities (Brooks et al., 2008). Parents in areas of socio-economic disadvantage are not always aware of their roles in supporting their children's learning or how to support it. It has been found that parents are willing to become more involved if approached in ways that build positively on their role construction and self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Whittaker, 2010).

The Doodle Families Programme offers potential opportunities to break intergenerational cycles of underachievement by working with families to best support their child's learning.

### 2.3 Effective partnership

The Home School Community Liaison Report (2006) suggests that involving parents in education is 'not centred in the home or school, but rather is to be seen as an ellipse in which there are two foci, the home and the school. This ellipse itself remains centred in the community,' (p. 5).

Teachers are encouraged to find new ways to create 'authentic learning communities' (Larrivee, 2000, p. 293). This could be achieved through reflective practice – for example if the parents are not engaging, is it because they are hard to reach or the school has yet to reach them? Effective schools, therefore, take account of the influence of the home on children's learning and they build on the experience children bring to the school and how the school can influence home learning. In this regard, the extent to which the Doodle Families Programme serves to improve home-school relations between parents and teachers will be examined.

Recent research points to the fact that there can be a series of benefits accruing from such programmes, namely that parents learn to support their children's learning; place greater value on education and learning; gain a deeper understanding of school systems; become more interested in developing their own literacy skills; form social and supportive networks which are maintained as their children move through the school, and are provided with increased opportunities for progression to further education and training (Swain, Brooks & Bosley, 2014). Heath (2010) described two critical ideas vital to the concept of family literacy: – (i) parents continued language interaction with their children across the lifecycle and (ii) the pleasure and enjoyment of spending time with their children on literacy activities. A programme of shared activities between the parent and child is a key approach in Doodle Families. This was identified as a key approach in shifting and embedding change in family literacy activity (CDI, 2015).

## 2.4 The importance of children's voice

The importance of involving children in research is frequently acknowledged (O'Donnell, 2000, 2003; Thomson and Gunter, 2009). It is highlighted that young people, as well as adults, have valuable insights into their own learning and these insights yield research that is more meaningful and has greater validity (Lewis & Porter, 2007). The questionnaire is a method which, when adapted for use with children, is suited to exploring their views and opinions. Children and young people can contribute if questionnaires are adapted to their competence level and if adults are prepared to support them with reading and writing as required (Cline & Frederickson, 2009). Creative and flexible approaches can provide opportunities for all pupils to express their views (Rabiee et al., 2005; Lewis & Lindsay 2000, McPhillips, Shevlin & Long, 2012; Long, McPhillips, Shevlin, & Smith, 2012). For example, students can draw their views or write the message that the drawing conveys or access the support of a scribe, as drawings can be ambiguous and difficult to interpret (Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay; 2000 Long et al., 2012). In this evaluation, the voices of the children are appropriately represented.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

The purpose of this process evaluation study was to examine in detail *the how* of the implementation of the **Doodle Families Programme** - September to December, 2017 - how it was delivered, the nature and extent of the supports required to support high quality delivery and key stakeholders' perspectives on how they experienced the programme.

In keeping with the purpose of the research detailed above a mixed-methods research design was used (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007) to allow for both quantitative and qualitative data to be collected. The use of a mixed method approach was based not only on the terms of reference of the study but also on the nature of the evaluation. Specifically, quantitative and qualitative data were combined through interviews, observations and focus groups in order to achieve a balanced picture. The quantitative approach (involving statistics including comparison pre and post) shed valuable light on the process of implementation of the Doodle Families Programme, while interviews and focus groups provided rich data on issues of implementation at local level.

#### 3.1.1 Research questions

The focus of this evaluation is to explore how the Doodle Families Programme was implemented and experienced by the participants - parents, children and facilitators and overall, to assess the fidelity and effectiveness of the Doodle Families implementation process.

This project sought to examine the extent to which the delivery mechanism was a good fit with the anticipated programme outcomes by exploring the following questions:

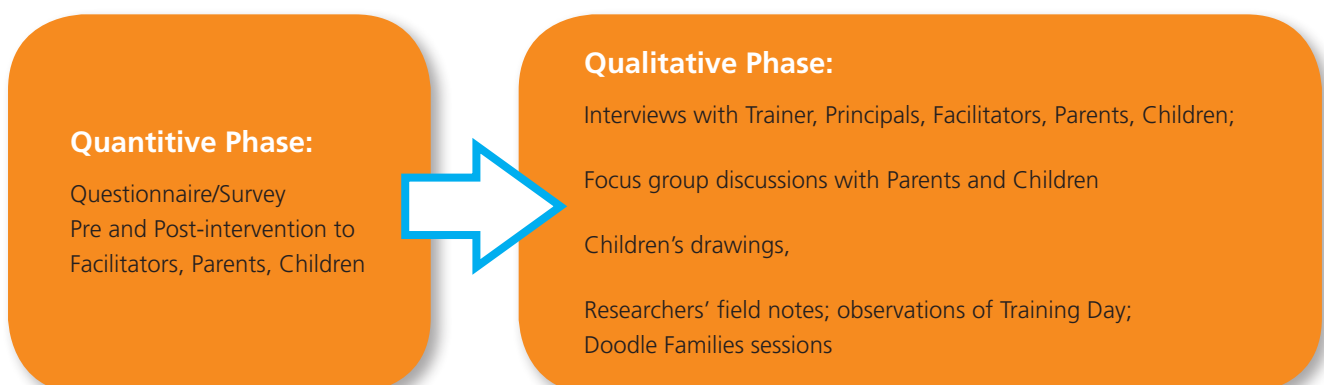
- What were the training and support needs of the programme facilitators and were these needs effectively met?
- Is the programme manual as designed relevant, workable and user friendly?
- What (if any) adaptations should be made to the Doodle Diary?
- What are the recommendations for promoting the primary outcomes of the Doodle Families Programme?

To answer these questions, a survey of the facilitators, the child participants and their parents was conducted using questionnaires pre and post intervention. This was followed up with semi-structured interviews with a sample of facilitators in each of the participating schools. Focus groups with parents and children took place at differing time points during the eight-week delivery of Doodle Families. Observation of the parents' sessions and also the children's sessions was also conducted (see Table 1). An observation of the training day for facilitators was also conducted. A table of data collection methods is outlined below.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The study employed a mixed methods research design approach - using both quantitative and qualitative approaches (see Figure 1).

Figure 3: Data Collection Methods





**Table 1: Data Collection Instruments and Target Populations**

Instruments	Dublin	Limerick	Total
Parent Questionnaires, Pre-Doodle Families	30	33	63
Parent Questionnaires, Post-Doodle Families	27	5	32
Pupils' Questionnaires Pre-Doodle Families	32	34	66
Pupils' drawings Post-Doodle Families	12	13	25
Facilitators' Questionnaires Pre-Doodle Families	Dublin and Limerick		12
Facilitators' Questionnaires Post-Doodle Families	Dublin and Limerick		10
Observation of Training Day; Interview with Trainer	Dublin and Limerick		1
Interviews with Principals	3	2	5
Interviews with Facilitators	6	6	12
Focus groups with parents	1	2	3
Focus groups with children	1	2*	3
Observations of Parent's Doodle Families sessions	2	2	4
Observations of Pupil's Doodle Families sessions	3	4	7

\*The scheduled focus group for children in Limerick did not take place as the facilitators felt that the children's ability to express their ideas was restricted by a lack of vocabulary and communicative skills. Instead they drew pictures to express their views on their participation in Doodle Families.

### 3.3.1 Questionnaires

Semi structured self-report questionnaires with a range of statements using a Likert scale for responses were designed for parents, facilitators and children, to register their perceptions pre and post completion of the Doodle Families Programme.

**Parents:** Facilitators distributed the questionnaires to parents during the first session. The parents' questionnaire could be administered orally or in writing. In some groups, the Facilitator read the questions to the parents who then completed and returned the questionnaire. A total of 63 parents/carers from Limerick and Dublin returned a completed questionnaire at the first Doodle Families session (Dublin, 30; Limerick 33). A final questionnaire was also given to parents/carers at the last session of the Doodle Families. A total of 32 completed questionnaires were returned (27 from Dublin, 5 from Limerick). The poor return rate from Limerick limited the opportunity to make pre- and post- comparisons.

**Facilitators:** The trainer distributed the questionnaire to the Facilitators at the training day ( $n=12$ ) and 12 questionnaires were completed and returned to the evaluation team. Ten Facilitators also completed and returned a questionnaire post-intervention.

**Children:** A child-friendly questionnaire with picture symbols was distributed to the pupils at the first Doodle Families session and the Facilitator read it to the group and explained how to complete it. Pupils were made aware that there were no right or wrong answers and were encouraged to think about how they really felt when answering each question. All the pupils' questionnaires were returned to the researchers ( $n=66$ ).

### 3.3.2 Focus Groups

Focus group interviews were used to examine and capture in more detail the views of the parents and children. Three parent focus groups and three children's focus groups were conducted during the final week of the Doodle Families Programme. Some issues emerged in relation to engaging with the focus groups (parents and children) in Limerick. While the focus groups with the parents were for the most part successful, in one instance it was challenging for parents to discuss some issues due to their own communication skills. Likewise, with the children - two groups in Limerick were challenged by a lack of communication skills to adequately express their views. These children were facilitated through a different medium – drawing and discussing their pictures.

*Parents' focus groups:* Additional time to feedback on their participation in Doodle Families was provided by parents' focus groups in Dublin (1) and Limerick (2). The focus groups took the format of a discussion with the researcher using questions to prompt the discussion. The researcher explained that the purpose of the parent focus group was to hear the views and opinions of the parents on Doodle Families. The Facilitator of each session convened the group and was present for the discussion. Consent was agreed prior to each discussion, which was audio-recorded and transcribed immediately afterwards. This was supported with the researcher's observation notes.

*Children's focus group:* Focus group discussions were organised in Limerick and in Dublin to listen to the children's views following their participation in Doodle Families. The children's focus group took the format of an informal discussion with the pupils about the activities they enjoyed during the Doodle Families Programme. Children were encouraged to respond individually, to listen to each other and to add their own comments to the discussion. Following this, each pupil created a collage picture of Doodle Families by drawing, colouring, sticking on designs and writing captions on the picture. They were encouraged to be creative and when the picture was completed, they explained and interpreted their work to the group.

### 3.3.3 Observations

A structured observation of the Training Day was carried out. Structured observations of the programme delivery were undertaken at different times during the Doodle Families sessions. An observation schedule was used to provide a framework to enable the researchers to record data systematically, to be alert to the same activities and to look out for the same things. The researcher was unobtrusive and avoided interaction during the sessions. The observation schedule recorded the following: learning environment, quality of interactions, resources and materials provided and adherence to the Doodle Families manual lesson content. Recommendations arising from the observations were also recorded.

Field notes of each observation were completed following each observation session. Six observations of parents' sessions and seven of children's sessions were conducted. The two communities - Dublin and Limerick - were equally represented.

### 3.3.4 Interviews

Questions were tailored for the facilitators and for the school principals. Each participant was interviewed once. A total of 18 interviews were conducted: five principals, twelve facilitators and

the Doodle Families trainer (See Table 1). Two pilot interviews were conducted, with a primary school teacher and an adult education tutor. This resulted in some editing to address overlaps, but no substantial changes were indicated or made. In the semi structured schedule, topics and focused prompts were prepared for the interviewer. Participants' views / perspectives on all aspects of the Doodle Families Programme were sought.

## 3.4 Data Management and Analysis

This evaluation study employed a mixed methods research design to examine how the programme was being delivered to, and received by participants (Rossi et al., 2004).

Quantitative data from surveys/questionnaires was transcribed into an excel file for analysis and charting under general thematic headings of literacy in and out of school.

Textual data from the questionnaires was transcribed and entered into an excel spreadsheet, labelled and organised according to the response to each question. Open responses and comments were manually recorded. Tables were derived for responses to each question and separate tables were created for data from respondents from Limerick and Dublin.

In order to ensure the credibility of the analysis of data and the trustworthiness of the research design, the researchers observed the following procedures:

*Description of the data:* All interviews and focus groups sessions were audio-recorded, and all recordings were fully transcribed following each interview. Researchers' field-notes provided context for each recorded interview.

*Interpretation* of the meaning and perspective of the participants' views was carefully considered at each stage as it gradually emerged from what the researchers learnt during their involvement with the Doodle Families Programme in the school settings. The researchers were conscious that their presence may interfere in some way with the behaviour of the various participants. Time was spent developing a rapport and trusting relationship between the researcher and the respondents in order to reduce the likelihood of giving biased information.

*Triangulation:* Multiple types of triangulation were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the research data: for example, the use of more than one method of data collection (observations, interviews, questionnaires); use of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods; and triangulation of findings from quantitative data, observation

notes and the focus group discussions. Collaboration and further comparative analysis of data between the researchers was also a feature.

*Audit trail:* A full record of data was kept- transcripts, field notes, observation notes etc.

### 3.4.1 Data analysis

The semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted face to face, audio recorded, and transcribed for coding and analysis using the software package NVivo. A three stage process of analysis was carried out using techniques such as open coding, categorisation of codes and data reduction as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984). The first stage involved organising the interview transcripts into categories based on responses to the questions used during the interview. This stage created 11 overarching categories. In the second stage, open coding was used within each of these categories to find recurring themes. Following further analysis the themes were mapped onto three main areas to guide the discussion of the programme implementation – Utilisation, Organisation and Fidelity. The findings are discussed within this framework in order to ascertain to what extent the Doodle Families programme met the criteria set down for these areas.

Response data in the self-report questionnaires from participating parents, children, and facilitators were initially analysed to identify themes arising. These integrated well with

the response themes in data from other sources. The quality of the data was constantly assessed by the researchers throughout the analysis, following guidelines according to Miles and Huberman (1994). This included checking for representativeness, researcher effects, looking for negative evidence, checking for confirming evidence and triangulation.

The findings from this evaluation, utilising both quantitative and qualitative data, will be presented under the headings of utilisation, organisation and fidelity as follows:

**Utilisation:** This section will focus on the selection of schools, participants and facilitators and the extent to which the target group, (parents and children), utilised the programme.

**Organisation:** This section will examine to what extent the structure of the programme supported the fidelity and implementation of the programme. Aspects in relation to training, resources and materials and the role of the HSCL teachers will be discussed.

**Fidelity:** This section will report on the extent to which facilitators adhered to the Doodle Families Manual and detail what aspects worked well and what aspects need to be changed/ amended.

\*While some of the outcomes from the process evaluation belong in two areas – e.g. utilisation and organisation, decisions with respect to where the most emphasis lay were made by the researchers and are reflected in the presentation of the findings.

**Table 2: Doodle Families Evaluation Focus**

Category of evaluation	Research Instruments and Measures
<p><b>Utilisation</b> – Engagement of target families; securing participant schools and facilitators; delivery of training in Doodle Families.</p> <p><b>Research Q</b> - Did the parents and children utilise the programme and if so to what extent?</p> <p><b>Organisation</b> - Programme support for implementation and fidelity of the Programme.</p> <p><b>Research Q.</b> To what extent did the organisation of the Doodle Families Programme work to support maximum engagement by participants and facilitators?</p> <p><b>Fidelity:</b> Match between Manual and Programme delivery.</p> <p><b>Research Q.</b> Did the facilitators adhere to the Doodle Families Manual? What was the experience of the facilitators in relation to fidelity? What aspects went well and why?</p>	<p><b>Presentation</b> by Researcher.</p> <p><b>Observation</b> of Training Day.</p> <p><b>Interview</b> with Trainer.</p> <p><b>Observation</b> of programme sessions (seven parent sessions, four pupil sessions) Dublin and Limerick</p> <p><b>Self-Report questionnaire</b> – parents, pupils, facilitators– pre and post Doodle Families.</p> <p><b>Interviews</b> (semi- structured) with all Principals (five).</p> <p><b>Focus Group</b> (Parents and Pupils) 1 in Dublin, – 2 in Limerick.</p> <p><b>Interviews</b> with Facilitators (12) in Dublin and Limerick.</p>



### 3.5 Participants and Sample

A convenience sample of schools was selected in Dublin and Limerick and these schools were invited to participate by CDI through the network of HSCL and School Completion Programme personnel. Six schools agreed to participate, three in Dublin, three in Limerick.

The target group were children and parents who lived in designated areas of disadvantage, and attended DEIS Band 1 schools (denoting the highest level of social deprivation). Pupils with a mixed range of abilities were invited to participate. Some of the pupils had completed the Doodle Den Programme but this was not an essential requirement. There were approximately 10 pupils in each group and 8/10 parents. While the attendance for each session was not recorded by the facilitators, attendance at all sessions was reported as excellent for both parents and children.

Data was collected at **different times** throughout the intervention to capture changes in implementation or context, for example, data collected in the initial stage may reflect a settling in and adjustment phase which may not be evident as the participants become more familiar with the programme. Data from participants' samples in different contexts (Limerick, Dublin) was equally represented in the sample.

### 3.6 Ethical Framework and Consent

The researchers planned and conducted the research in full compliance with the Faculty Ethics Review Committee of DCU. Ethical implications were considered and built into the research design. Participant schools were selected by CDI, and six schools were invited to participate in the Doodle Families Programme. Written consent to participate in the programme was received by CDI. Consent letters were also distributed by the evaluation team and signed by all participants prior to any data collection. Questionnaires and interview questions were prepared to be administered orally or written. All participants were asked to give informed consent. Throughout the design and implementation of the evaluation study, confidentiality was observed. Plain language statements were read to the participants to assure them of the voluntary nature of the research. All participants were advised they would not be identified in any documents and that their names would only be known to the research evaluators. The right to withdraw from the research process at any time was also explained, without disadvantage. Transcribed interviews, focus group and questionnaire data were stored on the evaluators' laptop and password protected – these data will be stored for two years after the final report has been presented. Data files on the two researchers' laptops will be deleted and all handwritten questionnaires will be shredded.





## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction: Overall indicators of value: expectations and evaluations

Doodle Families was enthusiastically received by the parents and children alike. Principals and facilitators described very high attendance at the weekly sessions and were surprised about the level of engagement of the parents and children. They reported that they had not previously experienced such a positive uptake for any other parental programme.

*They seem to really enjoy the whole hour. We've heard from one or two parents even that the kids say 'aw brilliant it's Wednesday, we've Doodle Families' so as a whole they obviously love it ... I was surprised about that, cause it's just an extension really of their school work, (FO6).*

One of the parents added '*you're let in on the little secrets in the classroom*'. They also realised that '*even if you are not good at reading you can help your child by questioning and talking*': this was something they had not known before. Facilitators commented:

*I think a lot of our parents were under the illusion, before they started this programme, I can't read or write I'm no help to them, sure they'll have to learn it at school. Whereas, now they've actually realised, oh, by even talking to my child and asking them different questions I'm helping them to learn and I'm helping them to develop. I think it's been really beneficial to a lot of our parents in terms of their own confidence and the relationship that they're going to build with their child going forward, (FO1).*

In relation to the Doodle Families Programme, parents stated that they wished the sessions to continue:

*It would be great if you could continue this [Doodle Families] at some stage, because you could let stuff like this slide you know if you take a break, or if the break is too long. It's good to have it reinforced, so even if you did it in the spring or we did it another time together, it kind of keeps it fresh. I also think as well it's good communication with the teachers too, it's nice to know what the teachers do and the rules, (Parent 1, Focus Group, Dublin).*

A follow up to the Doodle Families Programme was suggested, perhaps as preparation for the transition to second class next September. One parent commented

*It's nice to get prepared for what's going to happen because like that they're going upstairs so it can be exciting but it can also be daunting for them to go upstairs because it's the big classes, (Parent 3, Focus Group, Dublin).*

Other parents expressed a need for a facility for parent literacy to be associated with the programme. '*I feel that I would like a place to go to learn more reading and writing myself*', (Parent 1, Focus Group, Limerick).

In this section, data gathered from participating children, parents and facilitators enables a comparison of their expectations pre-Doodle Families, and their evaluations on its completion.

### 4.2 Children





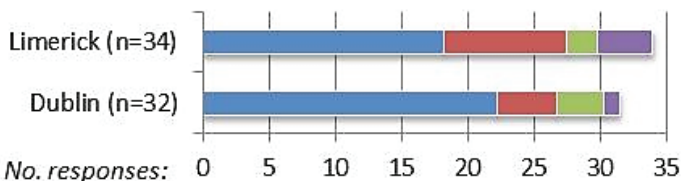
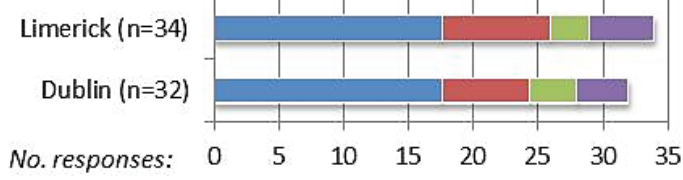
Children registered their pre-project feelings regarding literacy activities in and out of school, in a questionnaire in their first session. This enabled a degree of comparison with the qualitative records (focus group input and drawings) of their feelings about these activities, at the end of the project.

A pre-programme survey was completed by every child in the Doodle Families projects - Limerick (n=34), Dublin (n=32), in which he/she registered their feelings about literacy and related issues. The Likert scale used on the survey sheets was comprised of images depicting four response feelings: Very Happy Smiling Garfield, a Little Happy Garfield, a Little Upset Garfield, Very Upset Garfield. The facilitators explained the images, and asked the children to circle the Garfield whose feeling was closest to their own in response to each question. Every child marked a response to every question.



Garfield images were replaced by colour-codes in charts, as in the key to Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Feelings about literacy activities in and out of school: Response Profiles**

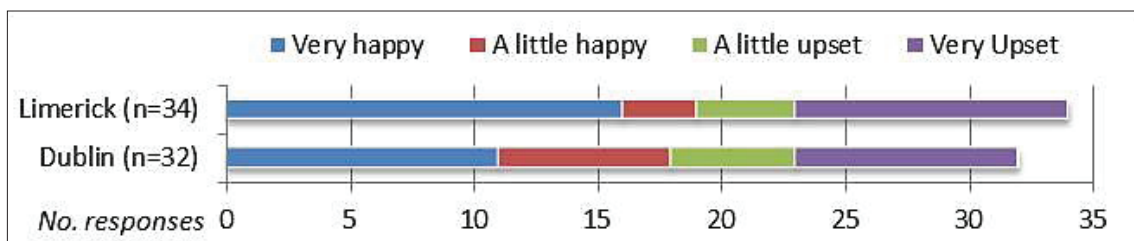
<i>Children's survey key &amp; corresponding Chart key</i>				
	■ Very happy	■ A little happy	■ A little upset	■ Very Upset
<b>Survey questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>			
<b>In School: How you feel about—</b>				
writing in class (stories, class work)?				
when it's time for reading in class?				
learning from a book?				
when we read library books at school?	No. responses: 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35			
<b>Out of School: How you feel about—</b>				
writing at home (stories, homework)?				
reading with an adult at home?				
reading for fun at home?				
when you get a book for a present?	No. responses: 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35			
reading during the summer holidays?				

Questions explored the child's willingness to participate in and enjoy reading and writing activities, and his/her perceived value of literacy activities. Some questions were adapted from the Motivation to Read Profile (Malloy et al, 2013). In the actual survey schedule/form, question order was mixed randomly, to help offset any tendency to skew the responses. For analysis, the questions were clustered thematically, to highlight the profile of feelings about engaging with literacy *in school and out of school* (at home and elsewhere). The tables below show the average response profiles for the clusters of questions under the two headings.

Overall, the profiles show strongly positive feelings towards literacy activities in both settings. While Dublin children's responses are more strongly positive for in-school literacy activities, Limerick scores higher for combined positive and very positive.

Children's feelings about seeing their parent/carer talking with their teacher is a more general measure of comfort with home-school relations:

**Table 4: How do you feel when your mam or dad talks with your teacher?**



Again, both groups registered strongly positive feelings, with the Limerick children showing more clustering at the extremes (very happy, very upset). There was a more even spread of responses from the Dublin children.

While it must be remembered that the children completed these forms in a Doodle Families session, the wish to please the facilitator and vote like their friends could play a part in the scores, however, they are very promising for the success of the project. Perhaps the most cautious welcome is for softening the boundaries between home and school (indicated by children's responses to the question about parents and teacher talking). The exuberance of the qualitative inputs, particularly the drawings with their emphasis on the Doodle Diary (a key home-school link for them) shows that in the Doodle Families Programme the children did enjoy the increased interactions between these two worlds.

#### 4.2.1 Children's views post-Doodle Families

At the conclusion of the Doodle Families sessions, the children's focus groups were convened. These were conducted as informal discussions with the children about the activities they enjoyed during the Doodle Families Programme. Below is a summary of their perception of the value of Doodle Families, drawn from text and pictorial data produced in one session.

##### **Talking about Doodle Families**

Data from one of the children's focus groups in Dublin ( $n=11$ ) is outlined below. Introductory questions and prompts were prepared by the researcher to encourage the children to participate. Coloured pencils, markers, craft materials, glue and posters were also provided. The following questions were asked; the children raised their hands to answer:

*What was your favourite activity that you did during the Doodle Families Programme?*

Seven replied to this question: Three children said 'My favourite activity was when we went to the library.' Two responded 'when we read books'. Three replied 'when I write...drawing and writing in the books,' [Doodle Diary].

*Did you talk about Doodle Families at home with Mammy or Daddy or anybody else?*

Two children replied yes to this question. One child said she talked about it 'with my mammy and my nana and my dad and my sister'. Another child replied 'I was telling my mammy that I love the book that we read in Doodle Families and I love my

*Doodle Diary*'.

*Did you do any of the Doodle Families activities at home?*

Two children in the group replied that they did Doodle Families activities at home. One child said 'we done a picture and we have the like Doodle connection into the book'. Another child referred to one of the activities in the Doodle Diary, 'finding a pumpkin on the sheet'. The children did not have any more to add.

*Who can tell me, in Doodle Families session, the activities, is that the same as you do in school?*

Four children responded. They agreed it was 'a little bit like school' and said

*It's kind of like [what we do in school]; you do writing and drawing ... and you do it in our class as well. ... I like reading books and we read books in school and a little play at the end of the day... on a Friday.*

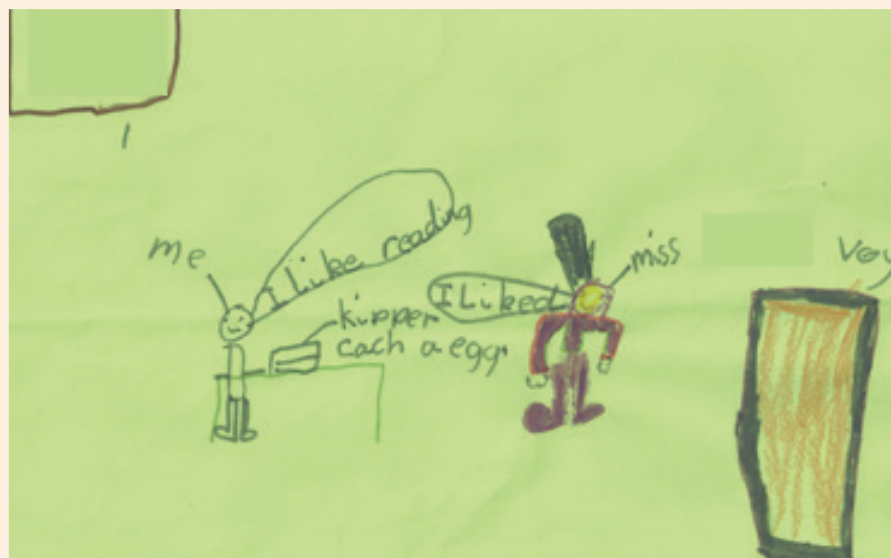
*What's the best thing you like about the whole Doodle Families, what's the best thing?*

Three children replied the library was their favourite activity.

##### **Picturing Doodle Families**

As this group of children were young – First Class/aged about seven years – and their facilitators felt they had limited ability to express their ideas on the Doodle Families Programme orally, it was decided to use drawing as a medium to facilitate inclusion of their voice in a format that was appropriate and enjoyable for them. The children were prompted to draw themselves and some of the things that they did at Doodle Families during one of the sessions.

Following this, each of the children created a collage picture of Doodle Families by drawing, colouring, sticking on designs and writing captions on the picture. They were encouraged to be creative and when the picture was completed, they explained and interpreted their work to the group. Below is a sample (nine) of the drawings and collages they produced:





The children responded excitedly to this task and engaged in individual discussion with the researcher as they coloured and drew their pictures and decorated each picture. Captions and ‘speech bubbles’ were suggested to be included on the picture. Some children wanted to include their teacher (=facilitator) in the drawing.

Pictures were clear and focussed, expressing happy smiles during the Doodle Families sessions. They find books exciting, and depict themselves as successfully engaged with literacy in Doodle Families.

Teachers often refer to the importance of motivation in contributing to successful learning which is reflected in the work of Baker & Wigfield, (1999) and Guthrie & Wigfield, (2005), who point to the relationship between reading motivation and reading achievement. Recognising when children are engaged in literacy activities, and also, when they are not, is a process that is key to evaluating the potential success of any new initiative being offered.

### 4.3 Parents

A semi-structured self-report questionnaire was designed for parent participants to complete at the start and end of the

Doodle Families project. Parents were invited to complete it in writing, or to dictate their responses with a friend at home, or receive help from the HSCL teacher. All the parent participants completed the initial questionnaire, (Limerick (n=34), Dublin (n=32)), registering their perceptions regarding their children’s literacy activities and learning, and their expectations of the Doodle Families project. At the end of the project, 27 of the 32 Dublin parents completed the form, but forms were received from only one group in Limerick (five parents), so these data have been omitted.

Participants registered their responses to the survey statements on a five-point Likert scale. In the charts of responses below, letter codes are used to link responses to the listed survey statements. Likert scale points are colour coded, and labelled with acronyms as follows: SA=Strongly agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly disagree.

Below are tables of data from the pre- and post-Doodle Families surveys of parents’ expectations and evaluations of the programme. They reflect important areas relating to children’s literacy activities: parent engagement in literacy activities in the home, and parent-child-school relations. There is also reference to parents and children engaging with the local library – engaging together with literacy in the public domain.

**Table 5: Doodle Families impact for parent and child at home**

Pre-Doodle Families Survey statements	Codes	Post-Doodle Families survey statements
Parents have a very important role in their child’s development of reading and writing	A	I enjoyed taking part in Doodle Families Programme
I help my child with his/her reading and writing homework every day	B	I have learnt new ways to help my child with homework
I would like to learn more about how to help my child become a good reader	C	I feel more confident in helping my child with his/her reading
Doodle Families will give me ideas and new ways to help my child with homework	D	I will use the ideas from Doodle Families at home with my child.
<p><b>Limerick, pre-DF</b></p>	<p><b>Dublin, pre-DF</b></p>	<p><b>Dublin, post-DF</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ SD</li> <li>■ D</li> <li>■ U</li> <li>■ A</li> <li>■ SA</li> </ul>	

It is clear from the above charts that the Limerick parents were more enthusiastic than their Dublin peers at the start of the Doodle Families programme. But the level of positivity is high in both places – a promising starting point for the Doodle Families aim of promoting home involvement. The Dublin cohort’s enthusiasm had risen remarkably by the end of the project. The most dramatic improvement came in relation to statements C and D, indicating that parents had gained confidence and were

ready to try new ideas at home with their children.

The next set of tables/charts cover the area of parent involvement in school and school work, and their use of libraries with their children. They were asked to respond to three positive and three negative statements (note: the higher the disagree/strongly disagree responses to the negative statements, the more open to home-school collaboration the respondent is).

**Table 6: Parent engagement with school/library: responses to positive statements**

Codes	Pre- and Post-Doodle Families survey statements		
E	I can talk to the teacher about my child and how he/she is getting on with his/her school work		
F	I would like to volunteer in my child’s classroom		
G	I intend to stay involved in any family literacy programmes that may take place in my child’s school		
■ SD ■ D ■ U ■ A ■ SA	<b>Rs Limerick, pre-DF</b> 	<b>Rs Dublin, pre-DF</b> 	<b>Rs Dublin, post-DF</b> 

**Table 7: Parent engagement with school/library: responses to negative statements**

Pre-Doodle Families Survey statements	Codes	Post-Doodle Families survey statements
The teacher is responsible for teaching my child to read	A	Doodle Families Programme was a waste of time for me
I see no improvement in my child’s reading since last year	B	Doodle Families did not make any difference to my child’s interest in books or reading
Going to the library with my child is a waste of time	C	Going to the library with my child is a waste of time
<b>Rs Limerick, pre-DF</b> 	<b>Rs Dublin, pre-DF</b> 	<b>Rs Dublin, post-DF</b> 

Again, there is a remarkable increase in positivity in the Dublin parents' post-Doodle Families responses, and stronger rejection of negative statements. The majority of parents agreed that they have a very important role in the development of their children's reading and writing, with the Limerick parents responding (pre-Doodle Families) more positively to this statement. This group was also more firmly of the view that the teacher is responsible for teaching their child to read. A large number of parents in Dublin disagreed with this statement. The majority of parents reported that they help their child with homework, with a larger proportion of respondents in Limerick responding positively to this statement. Parents varied in their views about talking to the teacher about their child's school work, with parents in Limerick reporting more positively. All parents would like to learn more about how to help their child become a good reader and a minority would be willing to volunteer in their child's classroom. A significant number reported they would stay involved in any further literacy programmes in their child's school.

Overall, these responses are a resounding endorsement of the value of the Doodle Families experience for parents' engagement in literacy activities in school, in the home, and in public recreational spaces. In addition, it is clear that, parents want to develop their skills to be much more actively engaged in their children's education, indicating how their own confidence has been greatly strengthened.

At the end of the project parents were asked to describe what they had learned from participation in the programme. A sample of parent responses is presented below:

*How to help my child at home with reading and writing and to not correct all spellings, (Parent 16).*

*I learned the different ways in which children can learn.... how to help my child at home with reading and making up stories, (Parent 23).*

*How to expand on stories and conversations with my son. It got us interested in going to the library, it built up relationship with parents and teachers. Introduced different ways of talking to my son and asking questions, (Parent 21).*





### 4.4 Facilitators

Pre-Doodle Families and post Doodle Families surveys were completed by the Facilitators. This cohort comprised Class teachers (4), HSCL Teachers (4), School Completion Personnel (2) and Support Teachers (2) i.e total of 12. Five reported more than ten years teaching experience, four had between seven and ten years and one had between four and six years, i.e. total of 10 respondents. Two facilitators did not complete this question. Twelve completed the pre-Doodle Families survey; ten completed the post-Doodle Families one. The Limerick and Dublin cohorts are counted together here: simple geographical grouping would not be useful because this population was more varied than

either the parents or children.

Facilitators responded to statements relating to elements of the Doodle Families Programme and were asked to respond according to the extent that they agreed or disagreed with each statement - strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree.

Most statements in the first section of the Facilitators' pre-programme survey differed from those in the post-survey form, but there was mutual relevance. Below the data from both are charted; the linked statements from the pre- and post-surveys are aligned above the charts:

**Table 8: Facilitators' perspectives on the Doodle Families programme pre- and post-project**

Pre-Doodle Families Survey statements	Codes	Post-Doodle Families survey statements
Parents involved in literacy programmes are more confident in supporting their child's literacy and school work.	A	Parents involved in Doodle Families are more confident in supporting their child's literacy and school work.
Doodle Families is just another initiative that takes a lot of teacher time for little gain.	B	Doodle Families is just another initiative that takes a lot of teacher time for little gain.
Doodle Families can involve parents in their child's school work.	C	Doodle Families training is relevant and appropriate to participating parents' needs.
Doodle Families is a good way to have fun with literacy for children.	D	Activities and games were delivered at a suitable level.
Parents need to have good literacy skills to take part in this programme.	E	No improvement in a child's reading after Doodle Families.
Doodle Families will show parents how to have fun with literacy.	F	Children who participated in Doodle Families show increased interest in listening to stories.
 <p><b>Pre-DF</b></p>		 <p><b>Post-DF</b></p>



The findings above show that prior to the implementation of Doodle Families, the Facilitators were positively disposed towards family literacy programmes in general (statement A, pre-intervention). They were confident that Doodle Families had the potential to involve parents in their child’s school work (statement B, pre-intervention) and would foster parent-child enjoyment of literacy activities at home (statement F, pre-intervention). It is noticeable however, that post-intervention, the Facilitators were less positive in their responses that parent confidence is specifically due to participation in Doodle Families (statement A, post-intervention). They did however, report positively that children who participated in Doodle Families showed an increased interest in listening to stories – which echoes their beliefs pre-intervention that listening to stories and having fun with literacy is fundamental to fostering parent-child enjoyment of literacy (statement F pre and post intervention).

Despite the strong positive motivation towards Doodle Families prior to the intervention, the responses post-intervention suggest that the reality of implementing a new literacy programme and the various operational challenges faced (two hours per week for eight weeks) in addition to their normal teaching duties, had moderated the initial enthusiasm to some extent. Comments from Facilitators regarding the Doodle Families supports are presented in the next sections.

The remaining prompt statements were identical in both surveys. Facilitators’ pre- and post-statements are charted under two headings, to show how their initial thinking on the Doodle Families process did/did not change with experience. Under the first heading are comments about training and tools, the delivery of the Programme and Facilitators’ pre- and post-programme responses to these.

**Table 9: Doodle Families Training, Tools and Delivery**

Codes	Pre- and post-Doodle Families Survey Statements (St) and charts of responses (Rs)	
G	After school is the best time for Doodle Families sessions for parents.	
H	After school is the best time for Doodle Families sessions for children.	
I	Doodle Diary is/was an unnecessary task.	
J	The manual is workable and user friendly and has relevant activities.	
K	The training gives facilitators good ideas to make literacy activities fun for the children.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: blue;">■</span> SD</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> D</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> U</li> <li><span style="color: red;">■</span> A</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">■</span> SA</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rs</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pre-DF</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">St: G H I J K</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rs</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Post-DF</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">St: G H I J K</p>

Facilitators were opposed to post-school meeting times for parents at the start of the project, and were more opposed at the end, while approval of post-school sessions for the children rose. The Doodle Diary (I) lost ratings, while positive ratings rose regarding the value of the Doodle Families Manual (J) and of the

training (K).

Finally, the Facilitators' responses to statements regarding Doodle Families as enabling parents to support their child are noted below:

**Table 10: Doodle Families, Families and Literacy**

Codes	Pre- and post-Doodle Families Survey Statements (St) and charts of responses (Rs)	
L	Doodle Families should be extended to more families to build on children's confidence and enjoyment of school.	
M	Doodle Families gives parents confidence in helping their child to become a good reader.	
N	Teachers could do this work with parents without a Training Workshop.	
O	It is not possible for Doodle Families to have any effect on the levels of reading in the home.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ SD</li> <li>■ D</li> <li>■ U</li> <li>■ A</li> <li>■ SA</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rs Pre-DF</b></p>	<p><b>Rs Post-DF</b></p>

In the pre-Doodle Families survey, Facilitators were asked to give comments on what they expected parents would learn from Doodle Families. Typical replies included:

- An opportunity to experience reading and writing as a fun shared activity;
- Greater awareness of how their child learns to read and write, and of the importance of fostering rich oral language;
- Strategies to use at home to help their pupils become better readers and writers.

Between pre- and post-Doodle Families evaluations, Facilitators' appreciation grew for the value of Doodle Families for building families' and parents' confidence in their capacity to support their children's progress in and enjoyment of literacy (L, M), although rejection of the negative evaluation in statement O lessened the positive outcomes somewhat. The idea that the Programme could be delivered without training (N) was rejected more strongly post-Doodle Families. Overall, Facilitators' appreciation of the quality and value of this Programme has grown.

Facilitators' comments add richness and deeper insights to these profiles. Prior to the intervention, Facilitators were asked what

they expected parents would learn from Doodle Families and any difficulties parents may have in supporting their child's learning. Typical replies from the focus groups included:

*An opportunity to experience reading and writing as a fun shared activity, (Parent 6, Focus Group, Dublin).*

*Greater awareness of how their child learns to read and write, and of the importance of fostering rich oral language, (Parent 2, Focus Group, Limerick).*

*Strategies to use at home to help their pupils become better readers and writers, (Parent 3, Focus Group, Dublin).*

The training workshop, the Doodle Diary and the resources used in Doodle Families were very positively regarded by the large majority of respondents. One of the respondents reported that 'the content was very do-able as a teacher', (FO3).

A large majority considered after-school to be the optimum time for the children's Doodle Families session, but not for parents. While there was a mixed response for the time for parents, during the school day was preferable.

Some of the challenges reported were as follows:

*The beginning was a challenge because I did not know the 1st Class students, (FO2).*

*The child content was a lot to get through in just 1 hour, (FO3).*

*Finding a way in delivering the children's programme from the manual to suit the needs and ability of the children, (FO4).*

*Too much content to be covered each week, (FO6).*

*I did the children's group and I found there was far too much content to cover in each session, activities could not be finished, (FO7).*

Facilitators also commented positively on the future of Doodle Families and listed what they perceived as the positives of the Programme namely:

- Learning more about how pupils approach literacy in school.
- Parents gaining confidence from more involvement with the school and the teachers.
- The idea that literacy is all around us and not just sitting reading a book together.
- Learning literacy strategies that the parents can work on at home.
- Getting ideas/ resources/signposts to support literacy standards.
- Using the Doodle Diary to help pupils be proud of the literacy work they have completed and to increase their self-confidence.
- Learning how to support parents in giving praise and to highlight the specific ways that children are learning.
- Building parent's confidence to empower them to help their children.

The above are clear indicators that Doodle Families's warrants evaluation to maximise its already powerful potential. This conclusion is confirmed in data from other elements in the research consultations and observations, as will be seen below. The process evaluation findings are reported under three headings: Utilisation, Organisation, and Fidelity.



## CHAPTER 5: PROCESS EVALUATION FINDINGS

### 5.1 Utilisation

Using the evaluation framework, **utilisation** will focus on the selection of schools, parent and child participants and facilitators and the extent to which the target group, parents and pupils utilised the programme.

#### 5.1.1 Recruitment Schools

CDI invited schools in disadvantaged areas of Dublin and Limerick to participate in the Doodle Families Programme. Six schools, three in Dublin and three in Limerick volunteered to participate, and the programme was delivered in these. Each school was in a disadvantaged urban area and part of the DEIS schools support programme.

#### 5.1.2 Participants

The Doodle Families coordinator in each school invited families to take part. Thirty-two parents and children in Dublin participated, thirty-four in Limerick. All the children were in First Class.

#### 5.1.3 Facilitators

Facilitators were invited to participate in Doodle Families by the school principal or the HSCL teacher with responsibility for parental involvement. Twelve facilitators took part in the training. There was a wide variability of experience amongst the facilitators ranging from experienced teachers to community and adult educators (School Completion personnel, HSCL). This led to gaps in relevant skills or experience. Some facilitators knew the children in their Doodle Families group before the project started; others did not. The simple need to build relationships with the children could complicate the effort to get the project flowing, as exemplified in the following comment: *'The beginning was a challenge because I did not know the 1st Class students'* (FO3).

#### 5.1.4 Project setting

The Doodle Families sessions generally took place in a separate room to the children's classroom, either the learning support or resource room. A snack and drink break was provided for all the children on arrival and while this was warranted, it took time away from the session resulting in teachers being rushed to complete all activities as detailed in the Manual.

The learning environment for Doodle Families in each of the schools was well resourced with appropriate furniture and children seated at tables in groups all together. Posters, materials, books and pens were all readily available. Preparation for the

session by the Facilitators was evident. A warm up session as the children arrived, with games, clapping, reciting rhymes etc all helped to settle the children. The overall atmosphere was informal, welcoming, and fun.

In all of the observations conducted the learning environment was well suited to the programme - rooms were well laid out and they created a warm atmosphere conducive to learning and pupil interaction.

#### 5.1.5 Pupils' and Parents' Doodle Family Sessions

Children's attendance at the Doodle Families sessions was reported by the Facilitators to be very consistent and encouraging. Numbers attending each session varied between eight and twelve children per group in both Dublin and Limerick.

Parent attendance was reported as mostly consistent by the Facilitators and genuine reasons for absence were recorded by the Facilitators. The number of participants recorded by the researchers varied between two and ten parents. There was clear evidence from the observations that parents engaged enthusiastically in the sessions and that there was an atmosphere of fun and support between all parents and Facilitators.

One of the parents described it as follows:

*It's nice to get an insight what happens in school because when we went to school you were dropped to school and that was it. There wasn't that teacher-parent relationship where you can approach a teacher and say I think they might be struggling and certain things, (Parent Focus Group, Limerick).*

Parents reported very positively on the benefits of their participation in Doodle Families: *'it's really enjoyable because it's, you know, relaxed. It's not like you're coming to school,' (Parent Focus Group, Dublin).* Another noted the following:

*There was a good group dynamic and the parents had got to know one another over the eight weeks of the programme. It was beneficial that the kids knew what we were doing here and we were involved in something specifically for them and there was an interest there, so I think that worked well for my daughter because it was specifically for her- it was her time of year and it was my time just talking about her and her learning- so I think that worked very well in my house, (Parent Focus Group, Dublin).*



Parents were extremely positive about the Doodle Families Programme. They stated that so much has changed since their schooldays and one parent expressed a desire to return to school because *'while I was useless at reading, I was good at art and in school these days they do art and all those things'* (Parent Focus Group, Limerick). Parents were fulsome in their praise for getting insights into how their children learn and reported that subsequently, they have made adjustments in how they support the children's learning in the home.

*My fellow is always getting up and walking around when he is doing his homework – before I would tell him to stay sitting – but now I think he needs the break and to walk around so I let him do that – that is the way he learns, (Parent Focus Group, Dublin).*

There was wide variance reported in the level of parent participation in the Doodle Diaries with some enthusiastic while others found it hard to find time to engage. The level of engagement and commitment varied among the parents. As one of the facilitators reported:

*Yeah, ... the key thing about it is that they [the children] really are into it as their parents are into it. Yeah, and some of them aren't, as some of their parents aren't into it, and you can kind of see that some of their parents aren't engaged, like they're saying that they're doing different things at that time, (FO6).*

*They did do work on the Diary at home and they loved sitting down together and the parents even remarked how they loved pulling out the diary in the evening and they worked on it together but it was about a half and half within the class that actually did it, (FO3).*

Some facilitators were challenged by the diverse level of abilities in the group:

*Finding a way in delivering the children's programme from the Manual to suit the needs and ability of the children, (FO2).*

*Oh, for parents we have loads of time. Absolutely, It's perfect. The kids, absolutely not. So because I have such diverse reading abilities, I only have four or five in my group and X would have four or five depending on who's there, so it's not a huge group, but we could read a book for twenty minutes and our reading time here is not twenty minutes. It would be ten minutes, but we couldn't get a book read in ten minutes. It's too ambitious, (FO9).*

### 5.1.6 Duration of the programme

The Facilitators commented that the prescribed content of the Doodle Families Programme was overly ambitious for the duration of the programme – eight weeks:

*I think eight weeks is too short. I think it's very hard to see like the outcomes you'd like to see in eight weeks. Like if it was, you know, to have read two fairy tales or something in eight weeks -that's possible, but not to kind of bring the family literacy alive in the household in eight weeks, I'm not sure that's possible you know? I think for them they need more than eight weeks ...especially for the children, for the parents they're long enough, (FO5).*

*The child content was a lot to get through in just one hour, (FO4).*

*Too much content to be covered each week, (FO3).*

*I did the children's group and I found there was far too much content to cover in each session, activities could not be finished, (FO1).*

The length of the programme and a desire to see it run over a longer period was another issue that emerged. Parents needed time to get familiar with the weekly sessions in school and eight weeks was insufficient time. Facilitators expressed a view that when they had got 'buy in' from parents the programme ended. They advised that the programme be extended to run for a longer period.

In exploring the challenges that parents faced, principals reported that in the main, these related to issues of low self-esteem and low confidence levels:

*It's probably down to their own school experiences, their life experiences as well. Very low self-esteem for most of these parents. Quite a number of them are actually past pupils, because I'm long enough around so I would know quite a number of them...so self-esteem is a big thing and they're kind of complicated lives that they lead – small pupils and a lot of single mothers... a lot struggling financially. We've a significant number of them with medical problems and a lot of them with addiction problems. So actually getting them engaging in any way, at any basic level with school and coming in and coming in to meetings, even our parent-teacher meeting's tomorrow – even at that level, that's progress, (School Principal, 2).*

This note of realism is important: eight hours of extra tuition, plus similar hours working with parents, is not enough to counteract the impact of lifelong and often multigenerational social and systemic marginalisation.

### 5.1.7 Pupil engagement

Pupils engaged enthusiastically with the Doodle Families Programme and expressed positive feelings towards all aspects of it. The connection between home and school was clearly evident from reports of child/parent engagement in discussing aspects of the Doodle Families session in the home resulting in stronger connectivity between home and school.

### 5.1.8 Facilitators' views on what aspects children enjoyed

The key programme elements that emerged from the Facilitator's responses were the trip to the library, the structure and routine of the sessions, the excitement of the Diary and being allowed to bring it home to show parents. The trip to the library was also an overall success for all pupils, parents and facilitators:

*The trip to the library last week was fantastic – they all really enjoyed it. They got a tour of the library, met the librarian and then we read a Christmas story to them and they did a colouring competition. It was great for them to see the library and find out what way it was laid out, (F03).*

*The pupils loved the routines at the beginning of the lessons together with the quick pace and the variety of activities that they could engage in, (F02).*

*They loved the aspect of coming in and having a quick starter activity... they loved the changing around in groups, they loved the movement of it, they loved the ownership of making up their own rules and it was their programme and their special programme and they loved that, they loved the diaries even though they didn't get the opportunity to do it at home when anytime they got the diaries they go super excited to get the diaries, (F01).*

*They do actually love the games at the start.... the warm up games with phonics ...they've really enjoyed them and they enjoy the reading. They enjoy the whole set, they really enjoy it actually, (F09).*

*They loved the ice-breakers at the start. That worked really well. That 'Mystery Writing', that tour, was a*

*great idea as well. The story prompts ...they'll love that because it's very interactive and they'll be involved in setting up the story for themselves. Their attendance has been fantastic. They're eager to come every week, they're really glad to be involved, (F03).*

*I think the quick pace did suit them and a variety that there was a huge amount of variety, they loved the aspect of New York, Paris, the tourist... that session they absolutely loved it, (F02).*

In conclusion, from an utilisation perspective, the participants - parents and pupils alike – engaged enthusiastically with all aspects of the programme and they derived many benefits. In relation to the pupils, they were provided with an opportunity to participate in a fun and engaging manner in literacy activities and to grow in confidence in their own ability as readers. In turn, the increased communication facilitated by the programme between parent and pupil was extremely positive and empowering for both parents and pupils alike.

## 5.2 Organisation

The key question examined under organisation was to what extent the structure of the programme supported the fidelity and implementation of the Programme. To answer this question, aspects in relation to training, resources and materials and the role of the HSCL teachers will be discussed.

### 5.2.1 Training Day

The training day was well organised and delivered and there was a pleasant and friendly atmosphere with all participants (14) chatting and socially mixing in groups as required throughout the sessions. Overall, there was a good balance between the Trainer's input and Facilitator participation.

The background to the Doodle Families Programme was well explained and the key activities, outputs and intended short and long term objectives were highlighted. The group were provided with adequate time to look at different lessons and to feedback as a group. The videos associated with the sessions were demonstrated - however some links were broken and this remained the case throughout the Programme. The CDI portal access to resources was discussed; however, it was not populated at the time of training.

While the key aspects of the Doodle Families Programme were explained and examples of activities were given, it was noted through observation that there is a need to differentiate for

teachers who were not primary school teachers – such as practitioners working in the School Completion Programme. This differentiation applies to the extent to which all Facilitators possess the knowledge as to how best to support children and parents' literacy. In addition, teacher knowledge is required to make adjustments to lesson plans in response to observed differences in learners. Some Facilitators from a post primary background expressed a lack of knowledge in relation to supporting literacy at primary level. However, in all cases they were working with primary teachers who supported them in all aspects of the Doodle Families Programme.

### 5.2.2 Resources and materials provided

Adequate funding was provided to each school to purchase new books, games and resources as needed for the Doodle Families sessions. Facilitators also received a copy of the Doodle Families Manual and access to the online portal with additional resources. Facilitators could download the Doodle Diary from the portal and print a copy for each child.

New books were purchased for the roll out of Doodle Families in some schools. A large quantity of writing materials, coloured markers, paper and pens was also provided for the sessions. Some schools used the materials and resources for sight words and word building activities already available in the learning support room. A Doodle Diary had been provided for each child to take home. At the end of the Doodle Family sessions, a special celebration was organised by the Facilitators. Each child was presented with a new book and a certificate of participation in Doodle Families. The school principal, Facilitators, and all the parents attended with their pupils and enjoyed cakes and snacks. The researchers were also present for this celebration.

While all Facilitators thought highly of the diary, the delay in getting the diaries printed at the start of the programme was problematic:

*Yeah, I thought it was lovely. I think it would have been better if we had the actual Doodle Diary from the start, it was a little bit busy, a little bit harder to manage, but it's a very positive thing and it really engages the kids with the parents, it's lovely, (FO8).*

Overall, the organisation of the Doodle Families Programme was well supported by the Facilitators who were committed and enthusiastic about engaging and empowering parents to learn new skills and strategies. The warm and welcoming atmosphere they created was evidenced by the high attendance and engagement of all parents and pupils.

The introductory session which reviewed the topic covered the previous week served well to recap on the previous session and to introduce the new topic.

### 5.2.3 Doodle Families Manual – Positives and Negatives

*The Doodle Families Manual –helpful? Absolutely! It was just so well laid out, and it was so, you know you have your time for each activity and the activities were there, the material you needed were there in front of you. You didn't have to go searching for anything, and the only thing that we didn't really use was 'The Mystery Tour', but everything else we used straight from the manual and it was very effective, (FO3).*

The Doodle Families Manual was positively received by all Facilitators. The range and variety of resources available served to allow Facilitators to implement the programme with ease without having to go searching for additional resources. It also served to support the uniformity of programme delivery among the different Facilitators.

There was widespread agreement that the programme content covered in the Doodle Families Manual was comprehensive, well balanced and carefully organised to ensure all the components of literacy were addressed. However, Facilitators reported that the Doodle Families sessions were somewhat 'content heavy' with too much content specified for the time allotted.

The video content was for the most part suitable, however, some video content, as observed, was too complex for parents and Facilitators reported that they found it difficult to sustain their interest.

In relation to the organisation of the project, the critical role played by the HSCL teacher was cited by principals in that the HSCL teacher had already established a good rapport with the parents, which helped to increase participation and involvement. In turn, the importance of having a link person for parents was considered important:

*There's a lot of staff turnover in DEIS schools as you know, so it's brilliant to have her {HSCL teacher} there who has the expertise and who has a wonderful way with the parents but I think she's delighted to have the opportunity to take these 13 or 14 parents, talk to them about teaching styles and learning styles and explain to them in a bit more detail what is going on in the classroom. She's able to train them on what's going on in*

*First Class and able to explain to them, so I suppose she has a bit more time than we would have in a September class meeting where you're speaking to the general body of parents and the parents feel safer because they can ask a question and they know they're not going to feel foolish, (School Principal, 4).*

In conclusion, it must be stated that the overall organisation of the programme and the supports provided by CDI served well to support the aims and objectives of the Doodle Families Programme as stated.

### 5.3 Fidelity

The key question examined under fidelity relates to what aspects were well implemented and to what extent there was a match between the Manual content and the Programme implementation.

#### 5.3.1 What aspects were well implemented and why?

The Facilitators' positive rapport with parents appeared to strengthen the schools' capacity to link home and school leading to more effective implementation of school policies on parental engagement (CDI, 2018) in that parents learned about the school's approach to language and early literacy teaching-phonics, reading, spelling, writing. In addition, parents gained new knowledge about learning styles; oral language; sharing 'teacher's tips'.

The pupils enjoyed all aspects of their engagement and the evidence suggests that their experience of fun engagement in many aspects of literacy will serve to motivate and sustain their interest in reading and writing. The involvement of their parents in the same activities was another positive aspect of the Doodle Families Programme which laid the foundation for discussions between parents and child. There are encouraging signs that participation in Doodle Families opened up communication between parent and child. The focus on the Doodle Diary as a link between home and school was well implemented in most schools.

All Facilitators were extremely positive about the programme content, resources and materials and while they listed aspects that could be changed, such as reducing the volume in the lessons and in the Diaries, overall they expressed a wish to continue with the Programme for a longer period in the future.

Facilitators welcomed the additional resources that were available if required, and highlighted the need to adapt the Programme to suit the needs of the pupil and parent cohort:

*Well I think it's up to the Facilitator to adapt to the needs of their particular group you know, the programme itself is phenomenal it's so well structured, the amount of resources within it are phenomenal so it's just I think, the variety is great and it's great to have the extra volume .....if you were looking for extra, (FO1).*

*...for our kids there was far too much so we had to adapt it, so I found that challenging in order to be able to adapt and keep up with the Doodle Diaries as well. It was far too much, we could actually run it for a whole term you know, or two terms even. It's better to have the volume and then adapt it to meet the needs, (FO1).*

The amount of material contained in the session was frequently mentioned. It was suggested that the content was too ambitious for the time allotted in that pupils needed a break following school and also had to receive a snack – this took some time from the hour session; consequently, many felt that they were rushing to get through the activities suggested in the manual. However, there was also reluctance on the part of Facilitators to discard any of the suggested activities, instead there was a suggestion that activities could rotate and this could lessen the load on the weekly sessions:

*We've implemented them, we've got everything done but it has been rushed. I felt once or twice as I was changing, transitioning from one activity to the next, when the kids would have loved to have stayed, so maybe... I'm not sure what you can take out then either, because they were all valued activities, (FO3).*

*Now this is the hard part, because I do think that each piece is valuable. I don't know if I'd leave anything out as such, if something could rotate that maybe one week gets the oral language, one week gets the free writing, or I don't know ... I know each piece is important, so I wouldn't like them to skip it altogether, (FO7).*

*They really enjoyed all of the activities but I think they would have liked more time. I felt like I was finishing up very quickly, to get through the content. I found it very content heavy, (FO8).*

Whilst it was suggested that the time to complete the activities outlined in each lesson was unrealistic resulting in Facilitators rushing to complete all tasks, nevertheless, all the Doodle Families sessions were delivered in the sequence outlined in the manual. There was a noted difference in one of the Limerick groups who had previously engaged in Doodle Den – in that



the children and the facilitator moved through the session with greater ease and completed more content than other observed groups in Limerick. It is possible that previous experience of working with Doodle Den resulted in greater familiarity with the Doodle Families Programme content and procedures.

### 5.3.2 Adherence to Doodle Families Manual

There was evidence that the Facilitators planned each session according to the Doodle Families Manual and selected activities which were appropriate to the level of the children. In general, there was good adherence to the Manual, however, some teachers differentiated to suit the children's varying levels of ability. For example, there were changes and adaptations made to the tourist session as it was considered that some of the cities were too far removed from children's own experience.

The duration of the parent sessions (one hour) was reported by some Facilitators to be too long to sustain parents' interest. The duration of the parents' session was shortened in two out of three of the Limerick schools as Facilitators felt that the hour was too long for parents to sustain their interest:

*I suppose the parents' sessions – I never did a full hour in them, it was just too long – they wouldn't stay. I think the most I got to was 45 minutes and O did find that {some} were kind of looking at their watches, (F01)*

In the main, there was good adherence to the session objectives in the Manual. However, in some cases, the duration of the parents' sessions was shortened, as some groups needed additional time to engage in extended conversation to sustain parents' participation.

### 5.3.3 The resources and materials provided

Video clips demonstrating how to support early handwriting for young children were positively discussed and parents commented that this was 'new learning' for them. In another session, photographs of school days long ago prompted a lively discussion and comparison with their children's classroom today. One of the Facilitators explained the school's spelling programme to the parents and showed the parents the copybooks and dictation spelling books that she uses in class with the children. Video clips from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and other sources were regularly used in each session.

Most of the resources were suitable; however, the language and content of the video showing language development –

which discussed domains of learning, and promoting pupils' self-regulation skills – was observed by the researcher to be too difficult for the parent participants. This has implications for the design of the programme and materials, but also the need to preview material at local level, to ensure that it is accessible for the parents' level of engagement.

In addition, as there was such a variance in the pupil's ability level, Facilitators in three schools in Limerick grouped pupils according to ability levels, with each facilitator taking a small group. This ran contrary to the idea of having mixed ability groups as advised by CDI.

### 5.3.4 Parents' engagement with the Doodle Diaries

There were divergent practices evident in the extent to which Facilitators used the Doodle Diary as directed. Some schools in Limerick (2) did not send the Doodle Diaries home and this created a dichotomy between the schools that sent the diaries home and those that did not and also created unequal opportunities for parental engagement in the home. The reasons given for not sending the diaries home related to some Facilitators' experience of the diaries not being returned and by pupils' reporting that the parents did not look at or engage with the diaries at home.

*They loved the diaries even though they didn't get the opportunity to do it at home ...anytime they got the diaries they got super excited, (F01).*

In addition, there were varying qualities of resources among different groups - black and white Doodle Diary photocopies were not as appealing as colour copies. The last five minutes when parents joined the children's session proved to be too short for proper engagement of parents with the Doodle Diary.

In conclusion, while there was a high level of fidelity in relation to all aspects of the Doodle Families, the divergence evident in the use of the Doodle Diaries served to create a dichotomy between some schools and the parents' ability to engage with the children's work. In addition, the shortening of the time period for the parent sessions ran contrary to the active engagement of parents in the sessions.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusions

All the participants highly commended the Doodle Families Programme and said they would like to stay involved and see it continue in their schools. They felt honoured and privileged to be part of the programme and looked forward to further involvement for their pupils and parents:

*Yeah. I believe it is a fantastic programme, I see that it works.... I can see from the confidence of the kids, (FO4).*

*Definitely I can see the value to children and the whole linking with the parents' and the children does push the parents' to come which is great even if they're not overly keen on it but I think when you do meet and have a focus with the parents it would be overall positive experience they have with the programme, I would hope so, (FO2).*

*Yeah I just think there'd be a huge loss if it didn't have a teacher from the school. No, actually and I think in hindsight.... it would be a lot more useful to have a lot more conversations with the teachers, (FO3).*

Epstein (2011) believes that 'school, family and community partnerships' is a better term than 'parental involvement' as it recognises that there is a shared responsibility to educating children. Research has shown that the partnership approach of child, family and school can determine school success (Epstein, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). There were encouraging signs that the Doodle Families Programme engaged parents through a partnership approach with the school and a child-focussed approach to early literacy.

This report details the outcomes of the operational evaluation of the Doodle Families Programme which took place in six schools, three in Dublin and three in Limerick. All the participating schools were DEIS Band 1. The outcomes of the research, both qualitative and quantitative, point to the positive impact of the Doodle Families Programme in increasing the effectiveness of school and community agencies working with families to develop children's literacy.

By opening up the window on how children learn, the existence of different learning styles and how all aspects of literacy are taught in school, parents' awareness and skills to practice effective family literacy activities with their children was significantly increased.

It was clear from all the data that parents, many of whom had previously negative views from their own schooling, grew

in confidence by sharing their stories and by engaging in the programme activities. The involvement of parents in the children's Doodle Families sessions increased parental knowledge as to how best to support their children's learning at home – how to question, listen and communicate more effectively about what happens in school through discussing the activities of the Doodle Families sessions.

Increasing parental involvement in the school was cited by all principals as problematic, however, the attendance level at all sessions in both Dublin and Limerick point to the positive aspects of the Doodle Families Programme in helping to improve home- school relations between parents, teachers and the whole school community.

Overall, while it is concluded that the Doodle Families Programme is appropriately developed and resourced to offer significant support to parents and children in relation to developing literacy skills, it is advised that the programme will be significantly enhanced by taking on board the recommendations and ideas presented in this report.

### 6.2 Recommendations

While many positive aspects emerged from this process evaluation, it is recommended that further research be conducted to examine the outcomes of the Doodle Families Programme for children and parents. In addition, it is suggested that an examination of the long term sustainable effects of the programme be explored.

Recommendations in relation to the future of the Doodle Families Programme are itemised below under the headings of Utilisation, Fidelity and Organisation.

#### 1. UTILISATION

##### 1.1. Targeting families:

- 1.1.1. Class teachers should be encouraged to be involved in targeting families to participate.
- 1.1.2. Children should be targeted based on assessment of their need and not just their willingness to participate.

##### 1.2. Delivery of training:

- 1.2.1. CDI should ensure that all HSCL teachers be made aware of the Doodle Families Programme and be offered professional training.

- 1.2.2. Expanded training is provided (a single Training Day on Doodle Families was not sufficient for a significant number of facilitators, particularly for those who were not experienced Junior Primary classroom teachers).
- 1.2.3. The training day be extended to two days to adequately cover all levels of experience and to provide adequate time for practice and discussion prior to implementation.
- 1.2.4. Modelling of the lessons should take place on the training day (for example, the reading session; a writing lesson; how to incorporate the Doodle Diary activities into a session; interacting with participants while watching a video clip). Non-teacher facilitators in particular would benefit from this.

## 2. ORGANISATION

### 2.1. Delivery:

- 2.1.1. All video equipment should be checked before the session so as to avoid loss of session time.

- 2.1.1.1. The positioning of the screen must be checked to ensure that all participants can see it fully.
- 2.1.2. The portal of online resources should be ready and uploaded with the necessary documents and resources before the launch of Doodle Families. This would allow Facilitators to see the content of the portal and to become familiar with its use.
- 2.1.3. All materials to be made available for Facilitators on the training day – Manual and Doodle Diaries - in order to familiarise them with the content and procedures for implementation.
- 2.1.4. The programme time should be extended beyond the 8-week period as parents and children who have committed are only getting to grips with the new learning, relating and connecting to the group etc., when they are told that it is all over.
- 2.1.5. The number of activities be reduced.
  - 2.1.5.1. The primary focus should be on developing



childrens' oral language skills, extending vocabulary and communicative competency in the initial lesson plans.

- 2.1.6. The time period be extended by an additional 15 minutes to allow for snack time and for children to complete tasks.
- 2.1.7. The Doodle Families session take place in a different room to the children's regular classroom so as create a new and different space for engagement with the Doodle Families Programme.
- 2.1.8. Allow more time for parents to see the children's work at the end of the session when they come to collect their child.
- 2.1.9. Doodle Diaries should be photocopied in colour for the children.
- 2.1.10. Children vote/select the next book to be read the following week.

## 2.2. Programme Support:

- 2.2.1. There is potential for the Doodle Families Programme to be offered as a Summer Camp programme for pupils and parents so as to avoid the 'summer slide' in pupils' reading.
- 2.2.2. More use should be made of group texting to send messages and further suggestions and links to parents between sessions.
- 2.2.3. Clear lines of contact to be established between the Facilitators and the programme provider –in relation to the level of support required and in establishing key personal contacts.

## 2.3. Community of Practice support group:

- 2.3.1. A 'community of practice' approach be adopted so that all class teachers of First Class pupils participating in the Doodle Families Programme be made aware of and included in the Programme so that they would be in a position to engage the children in conversations about the Doodle Families Programme.
- 2.3.2. The extensive resources video clips etc. available

to the Doodle Families Programme be made available to all First Class teachers.

## 3. FIDELITY

- 3.1.1. That the facilitators keep to time limits outlined for each activity.
- 3.1.2. If the facilitator feels that there is too much content in a particular lesson, then the main focus should be on the main objective of the lesson.

### 3.2. Doodle Families Manual:

- 3.2.1. A checklist for the programme implementation is recommended –for example, a list of books appropriate to the level of the pupils; materials and resources useful for each lesson; practical tips for parents to support oral language and communication with their child.
- 3.2.2. It should be made clear that there is permission to adapt the content to suit the ability level of the group in different contexts. This would allow for differentiation- matching the level of difficulty with the pupils' ability, while at the same time implementing the literacy activities as advised in the Manual.
- 3.2.3. The Doodle Diary is an important link between sessions and should be sent home regularly.

### 3.3. Monitoring and Resources:

- 3.3.1. Recommendation on timing and adaptation is needed as these were key issues. Also, guidance is needed on how best to use the last five minutes of the session when parents come to view their children's work. Time for the children's' session be extended to seventy-five minutes (from sixty) to allow children's' snack time at the commencement of the session.



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<sup>i</sup> DEIS: Delivering Equality in School. National programme to support designated disadvantaged schools.

<sup>ii</sup> See <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/evaluation-prevention-and-early-interventionprogramme-ireland-and-northern-ireland/>.

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