



Parent/Home Literacy
Environment Outcomes:
An Independent Evaluation
of Doodle Families

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Contents

List of tables	vi
List of figures	vii
Executive summary	viii
Notes on contributors and acknowledgements	xi
1. Introduction	1
1.1 What is Doodle Families?	1
1.2 Childhood Development Initiative background	1
1.3 Key evaluation questions	1
2. Literature review	2
2.1 Introduction	2
2.2 What is family literacy and who is it for?	2
2.3 Existing research on the effects of family literacy programmes	3
2.4 Existing research on the effects of family literacy programmes in Ireland	6
3. Methodology	8
3.1 Introduction	8
3.2 Evaluation design	8
3.3. Sample	9
3.4 Research instruments and measurements	13
3.5 Analytic strategy	14
3.6 Response, non-response and attrition	16
4. Family resources to support the development of children’s literacy	19
4.1 Introduction	19
4.2 Demographics and family structure	19
4.3 Educational qualifications	19
4.4 Language spoken in the home	20
4.5 Income difficulty of household	20
4.6 Number of books in the home	21
4.7 Previous school and interagency engagement	22
4.8 Parental access to learning infrastructure	23
4.9 Parent/guardian motivation for participation	23
4.10 Summary	24

5. How effective is school and community interagency working with families on the development of children’s literacy?	25
5.1 Introduction	25
5.2 Reading at home: incidence and frequency	25
5.3 Parent/guardian perceptions of children’s reading activities	27
5.4 Parental perception of children’s digital literacy	28
5.5 Parental perceptions of changes in children’s emergent literacy	30
5.6 Summary	33
6. What is the influence of Doodle Families on parental attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities in the home?	34
6.1 Introduction	34
6.2 Parents’/guardians’ own literacy behaviours and attitudes	34
6.3 Shared reading activities	36
6.4 Shared reading practices	38
6.5 Shared literacy practices in the home	41
6.6 Shared writing practices	44
6.7 Summary	46
7. What is the influence of Doodle Families on parental knowledge and confidence of how to best support their children’s learning at home?	48
7.1 Introduction	48
7.2 Parent/guardian confidence in school literacies	48
7.3 Parent/guardian knowledge of learning processes and learning needs	49
7.4 The balance of responsibility between schools and parents	51
7.5 Changes in the number of books in the home	52
7.6 Summary	54
8. What is the influence of Doodle Families on the relationship between parents and teachers, and overall impressions of Doodle Families?	56
8.1 Introduction	56
8.2 Influence of Doodle Families on building literacy relationships	56
8.3 Influence of Doodle Families on feeling supported	57
8.4 Confidence in seeking support	58
8.5 Overall impressions of Doodle Families	59
8.6 Summary	62
9. Summary and discussion	64
9.1 Introduction	64

9.2 Methodological approach.....	64
9.3 Key findings.....	65
9.4 Recommendations.....	67
References.....	68
Appendix.....	73

List of tables

Table 1: Characteristics of participating schools.....	11
Table 2: Summary of data collection to date.....	16
Table 3: Number of adult and child books in the home.....	21
Table 4: Parental involvement with school and CDI.....	22
Table 5: Parental reasons for participating in DF.....	24
Table 6: Frequency distribution of children’s reading.....	26
Table 7: Changes in children’s reading.....	26
Table 8: Frequency distribution of child-led reading.....	27
Table 9: Changes in child-led reading requests.....	27
Table 10: Changes in reading scores.....	28
Table 11: Changes in scores.....	30
Table 12: Descriptive statistics regarding frequency with which child is read to.....	36
Table 13: Changes in shared reading scores.....	37
Table 14: Change in duration scores.....	38
Table 15: Change in shared reading practices score.....	39
Table 16: Change in supporting reading activities score.....	41
Table 17: Frequency of shared literacy practices.....	42
Table 18: Frequency of shared literacy practices (2).....	43
Table 19: Change in shared literacy practice scores.....	44
Table 20: Change in shared writing practice scores.....	45
Table 21: Change in confidence scores.....	49
Table 22: Change in knowledge scores.....	51
Table 23: Change in the number of books for adults in the home.....	54
Table 24: Change in the number of books for children in the home.....	54
Table 25: Change in confidence scores.....	59

List of figures

Figure 1: Summary of cohorts.....	15
Figure 2: Distribution of parental education levels: comparison with GUI data.....	20
Figure 3: Distribution of household income difficulty levels: comparison with GUI data.....	21
Figure 4: Distribution of children’s books in the home: comparison with GUI data.....	22
Figure 5: Parental access to learning infrastructure.....	23
Figure 6: Frequency of digital literacy use.....	29
Figure 7: Perceived change in child.....	30
Figure 8: Perceived changes in oral language and storytelling.....	31
Figure 9: Perceived changes in reading behaviour.....	31
Figure 10: Perceived changes in writing behaviour.....	32
Figure 11: Changes in experience of school.....	33
Figure 12: Parents’ reading habits at Time 1 and Time 2.....	35
Figure 13: Parents’ attitudes towards reading, T1 and T2.....	35
Figure 14: Duration of reading sessions.....	38
Figure 15: Involvement in shared reading practices (% every time or sometimes).....	39
Figure 16: % Often or very often involved in supportive reading activities.....	40
Figure 17: Frequency of shared writing practices.....	45
Figure 18: Share of parents that are ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ with school literacies.....	49
Figure 19: Parent knowledge of learning processes and learning needs.....	50
Figure 20: Parent perceptions of the balance of responsibilities.....	52
Figure 21: Number of books in the home for adults.....	53
Figure 22: Number of books in the home for children.....	53
Figure 23: Changes in perceptions of learning 1.....	56
Figure 24: Changes in perceptions of learning 2.....	57
Figure 25: Perceptions of DF.....	57
Figure 26: Confidence levels in seeking support.....	58
Figure 27: Frequency of the use of new literacy approaches.....	62

Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation of Doodle Families, undertaken by academics at Maynooth University, with the specific remit to evaluate parental outcomes.

Doodle Families

Doodle Families (DF) is a standardised family literacy initiative conducted in schools. It involves a one-hour session for parents/guardians and a separate one-hour session for children in first class each week for eight weeks. The purpose of DF is to strengthen the links between the home and the school and to increase parental involvement, as well as to embed change in family literacy activities. It has been designed to be delivered in two components – one for parents/guardians and the other for children. Parents' sessions are delivered during the school day and the children's sessions are delivered after school.

DF 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 found to improve children's literacy (Biggart, Kerr, O'Hare, and Connolly, 2012). DF focuses on family literacy, recognising the importance of home literacy, families' shared experience and the need to support parents to increase literacy activities, better understand their children's literacy development, and maximise their children's learning and achievement.

An evaluation of the pilot DF programme, implemented between March and June 2015, indicates that participants felt that the DF programme presents a valuable opportunity to schools to enhance family literacy skills, and that it can contribute to further enhancement of children's literacy, cognitive, social and emotional skills in first class (Bourke and Higgins, 2016). The evaluation of the pilot found that many elements of the programme were successful. Key benefits of the programme included the opportunity for children and parents to spend dedicated time together engaging in fun literacy activities, and the enhancement of the parent-child relationship as a result of this.

Key questions

In line with the aims and objectives of DF set out by CDI, the key research questions for the evaluation were:

- How effective is school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy, from the perspective of parents/guardians?
- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities with their children?
- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian knowledge and confidence of how to best support children's learning at home?
- What is the influence of DF on the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers?

Methodological approach

Given the dearth of systematic analyses of family literacy programmes in the Irish context, a quantitative approach was adopted for the evaluation. Data were gathered using surveys that were administered

to parents/guardians at three points in time. Adopting a quasi-experimental approach, the research instruments sought to capture both 'before participation' and 'after participation' in DF measures. Capturing 'before' measures – measures of the family literacy environment and parent/guardian attitudes towards family literacy practices before participation in DF – made it possible to determine the possibility for change over time. Thus, we used this design strategy to capture the family literacy environment before and after participation in DF to determine whether DF has had an influence on parent outcomes and the family literacy environment immediately after participation, but also six months after participation (in the short term).

Data were collected from the same participants at three points in time, adding a longitudinal dimension to the study. A key strength of a study that captures the same respondents over a period of time is its ability to measure change in outcomes at the individual level. That is, it provides the opportunity to observe individual patterns of change. Such data provide an opportunity for inference regarding the effect/influence of an intervention or exposure – in this case, participation in DF. Over the three time points, 160 surveys were completed by parents/guardians. This report draws on the 51 parents/guardians who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2, and the 43 parents/guardians who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 3.

Analysis of the baseline data at Time 1 indicate that DF is successful in attracting a diverse range of parents/guardians including non-native English speakers and those who have not previously engaged with CDI or who were previously not actively involved with the school. While it was not possible to explore patterns of non-response, greater levels of disadvantage among DF respondents at Time 1 are evident compared with the national average, particularly in terms of economic situation and number of books in the home. There was, however, some evidence to suggest bias in the sample at Time 1 in terms of education level. That is, parents/guardians with very low levels of education appear to be under-represented among the DF sample, suggesting some non-response bias in our sample of respondents. This may be an unintended consequence of the selection criteria used by CDI to select children into DF.

Key findings

- How effective is school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy, from the perspective of parents/guardians?

While an exploration of children's outcomes was beyond the remit of this evaluation, we considered how parents/guardians perceive any change in their children's literacy behaviours. By Time 2, parents/guardians indicated that there were positive outcomes for their child in terms of oral language and storytelling, reading, writing and the school experience more generally. This was particularly the case not only regarding writing, but also regarding learning more generally and school attendance. However, there was no evidence to suggest that participation in DF had statistically changed parent/guardian perceptions of the development of children's literacy (including the use of digital literacy), either immediately after attending DF or in the following six months. These findings suggest that the model of interagency working that is embedded in DF has not been particularly effective on the development of children's literacy (despite positive subjective perceptions by parents/guardians at Time 2). However, it is important to note that 96% of parents before attending DF indicated that their child was already involved in reading at home.

- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities with their children?

DF had a positive influence on shared reading activities in the home, particularly in terms of enhancing engagement in supportive reading activities and engagement in shared literacy and writing practices immediately after completing the family literacy initiative. While there was no evidence of an ongoing short-term influence of DF after six months, DF did, however, have a positive influence (both immediately and in the short term) on the use of shared reading practices between parents/guardians and children. It is clear that parents/guardians were able to make changes in the home literacy environment and transfer best practice into the home, making learning more meaningful in the home, as a result of DF.

- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian knowledge and confidence of how to best support children's learning at home?

In the survey at Time 1, just over 55% of respondents indicated that they were motivated to participate in DF in order to increase confidence in helping their child with their homework. We find that DF has a large and positive influence on parent/guardian confidence levels around school literacies – that is, literacies valued in school settings – immediately after DF, but not in the short term. This suggests that DF is in some way associated with a significant increase in parent/guardian confidence levels, if only immediately after attendance.

However, even more importantly, there was strong evidence to suggest that DF has an influence on parent/guardian understanding of learning processes used by the school (regarding how reading is taught) but also regarding knowledge of the learning needs of their child, both immediately after DF and in the short term. Clearly, DF is supporting and enabling parents/guardians in this way.

We also observed that the number of books in the home for both adults and children increased at each of the three time points, and there was a positive change in the number of books in the home for both adults and children immediately after DF. However, a short-term influence of DF (six months later) on the number of books in the home was evident in relation to books for adults only.

- What is the influence of DF on the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers?

Before DF, the vast majority (at least 80%) of parents/guardians reported that they were 'confident' or 'very confident' in asking teachers, friends or family for support. Survey findings at each time point showed an increase in the confidence level of parents in seeking support from teachers but also other parents. We report a small but statistically significant positive influence of DF on parent/guardian confidence levels in seeking support immediately after participating, but no such influence in the short term. These findings suggest some areas for improvement, particularly in relation to effective ways to enhance parent-teacher relationships over a longer period of time, but also in relation to opportunities to develop social capital among parents.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made in light of the findings above.

- Our dominant implication for policy and practice is that based on these findings family literacy provision should remain funded and supported by government educational policy and social inclusion policy. While small-scale in nature, this evaluation points clearly to immediate and short-term effects of DF on the home literacy environment. Our findings indicate that CDI should continue to build up

and maintain partnerships with schools over the long term and roll out DF in more schools.

- The data presented here suggest an over-reliance on school-related reading materials before and after attending DF. Thus, we recommend that any further DF programme seek to increase the scope of reading materials used by children. Previous research reports positive outcomes for literacy programmes that also place emphasis on authentic (real-life) literacy activities (Purcell-Gates et al., 2012). Given the prevalence of the use of technology among children, further DF programmes should also attend to the way in which literacy is being transformed and how technology can be used in a meaningful and relevant way by families.
- While there is evidence to suggest that DF is supporting and enabling parents/guardians to build relationships around literacy, our findings suggest some areas for improvement, particularly in relation to effective ways to enhance parent–teacher relationships over a longer period of time, but also in relation to opportunities to develop social capital among parents. Social capital has long been found to be important in the development of children’s educational attainment and the development of adult literacy.
- Future DF programmes should pay attention to the gender of respondents. In this study there were clear gender patterns – almost all respondents were female, with few males (fathers/grandparents) taking part. The roll-out of future DF programmes should attempt to reach a greater gender balance among participants. This is important, given that previous research in the Irish context and beyond has highlighted the reproduction of expected gender norms through family literacy initiatives (Morgan et al., 2009; Rose and Atkin, 2011; Rose, 2013). More flexible modes of delivery may need to be considered to better capture opportunities to develop family literacy within families.
- While take-up and participation in the programme and the evaluation were high, this small-scale study has important lessons for avoiding non-response and attrition bias. Future evaluations should provide more time for more careful planning when recruiting parents/guardians for DF. More lead-in time is required by any research team to notify participants in a timely manner, in order to boost response and attrition rates.
- Finally, the limitations of this research could be remedied in future research. Beyond the size of the sample, a limitation of this evaluation was that it was only including parent/guardian outcomes and measures of the home literacy environment. Literacy gains among children should also be examined to evaluate the influence of DF. This should extend to non-quantitative outcomes including children’s enjoyment of using literacies. With a larger sample size, future research should also consider if the influence of DF on outcomes for parents and children extends to all, differentiating between high and low achievers, and those with parents who have both high and low levels of education.

Notes on contributors and acknowledgements

Dr Delma Byrne is an Assistant Professor/Lecturer at Maynooth University Departments of Sociology and Education, and Dr Caitriona Fitzgerald is a Research Assistant at the Educational Research Centre.

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provided through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Last but not least, special thanks go to all the parents/guardians who participated in this research, and the teachers and facilitators who gave up their time over the course of the evaluation.

Any remaining errors or omissions are our own responsibility.

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Doodle Families?

Doodle Families (DF) is a standardised family literacy initiative conducted in schools. It involves a one-hour session for parents/guardians and a separate one-hour session for children in first class each week for eight weeks. The purpose of DF is to strengthen the links between the home and the school and to increase parental involvement, as well as to embed change in family literacy activities. It has been designed to be delivered in two components – one for parents/guardians and the other for children. Parents' sessions can be delivered during the school day and the children's sessions are delivered after school.

DF was developed as a response to requests from schools who wanted a follow-up programme to Doodle Den, the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) after-school programme for senior infant children, which has been found to improve children's literacy (Biggart et al., 2012). DF focuses on family literacy, recognising the importance of home literacy, families' shared experience and the need to support parents to increase literacy, better understand their children's literacy development, and maximise their learning and achievement.

1.2 Childhood Development Initiative background

The CDI is funded under the government's Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, which builds on the learning to date from the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP). The initiative aims to break the cycle of child poverty in areas where it is most deeply entrenched and to improve the outcomes for children and young people where these are currently significantly poorer than they are for children and young people living elsewhere in the Irish State.

Based in Tallaght West, CDI was initially established through a partnership between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP), under the PEIP, which was set up 'to advance system change in favour of prevention and early intervention and to secure the mainstreaming of evidence-based programmes and practices by supporting the implementation of an area-based response to childhood poverty.' (Boyle and Shannon, 2018). Through innovative partnerships, CDI brings together the science of evidence-based practice and rigorous evaluation, with the spirit of an approach focused on the identified needs of children and families.

CDI designs, delivers and evaluates a suite of programmes across a spectrum of local needs including language, literacy, health, early years, conflict management and community safety. All CDI programmes are evidence-informed and manualised and are delivered through existing structures and services.

1.3 Key evaluation questions

The key research questions were:

- How effective is school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy, from the perspective of parents/guardians?
- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities with their children?
- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian knowledge and confidence of how to best support children's learning at home?
- What is the influence of DF on the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers?

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this section we review the family literacy literature. First, we consider what is meant by the term ‘family literacy’ and some of the key issues in the literature regarding family literacy initiatives. We then place emphasis on existing research in the body of work on family literacy that are of relevance to the key research questions addressed in this evaluation. This includes literature on:

- the effectiveness of school and community interagency working with families on the development of children’s literacy
- the influence of family literacy initiatives on the development of effective family literacy activities with children
- the influence of family literacy initiatives on developments in parent/guardian knowledge and confidence of how to best support children’s learning at home and improve the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers.

In the third section research findings regarding family literacy initiatives are considered, and finally Section 2.4 reviews existing research findings from family literacy initiatives in Ireland.

2.2 What is family literacy and who is it for?

Taylor’s (1983) ethnographic study of the development of literacy and language in American homes introduced the concept of ‘family literacy’. Her work also highlights that family literacy programmes should not only concentrate on formal schooling, but should also consider the cultural and language resources of participating families (Taylor, 1983; NALA, 2010).

International studies foreground the important role that not just parents but also the extended family play in supporting children’s literacy development (Baker, 2013; Barratt-Pugh and Rohl, 2015; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Mace, 1998; Prins et al., 2009; Saracho, 2008). That is, the family role in supporting literacy development is intergenerational. Earlier studies acknowledged the role of mothers, but less often the role of parents and extended family members (Saracho, 2008, pp. 355; Brookes et al., 2008). Saracho’s (2008, pp. 355–356) US study¹ found that fathers (like mothers) can be ‘responsible for the development of their children’s literacy and writing skills’ and can ‘learn new roles to promote their children’s literacy development’ (see also Macleod, 2008; Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003). Yet there is general agreement that while multiple family members scaffold children’s literacy development in the home, policy and interventions position mothers as conduits and key actors that are responsible for such, yet with a tendency to ignore mothers’ needs.

In the 1980s the concept of ‘emergent literacy’ (Teale and Sulzby, 1986) – which is central to Doodle Families (DF) – was developed in order to indicate the way in which children develop understanding about literacy from the first months of life from family interactions. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998, pp. 261) define ‘emergent literacy’ as ‘the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing, as well as the environments that support these precursors’.

¹ Saracho (2008) explored the effects of a literacy intervention designed to assist fathers of five-year-old children to develop their children’s literacy learning at home.

Interestingly, they concluded that the emergent literacy skills of children from low-income, at-risk backgrounds can be enhanced by modest additions to the early childhood (Head Start) curriculum (see Hannon et al., 2019 also).

More recently, attention in the family literacy literature is increasingly focused on digital literacy practices and the acknowledgement that children are immersed in a range of multimedia, multimodal practices involving extensive engagement with family members (Burnett et al., 2014; Eyman, 2006; Marsh et al., 2017; Plowman et al., 2010). Marsh et al. (2017) argue that a change in focus from 'family literacy' to 'family digital literacy' is required. While family literacy projects have traditionally focused primarily on print-based practices (Brooks and Hannon, 2013), Marsh et al. (2017) suggest that this is no longer a sufficient approach and that family literacy programmes should attend to the way in which literacy is being transformed in a digital age if it is to be meaningful and relevant to families (Rowse, 2006). This is also evident from Irish curriculum documents that highlight the need for family literacy programmes that attend to both print and screen-based texts (Kennedy et al., 2012).

Previous research has also highlighted the important connections between literacy development and socio-economic circumstance (Barratt-Pugh and Rohl, 2015; Brookes et al., 2008; Chmielewski, 2018; Hannon et al., 2006; Prins et al., 2009; St. Clair, 2008). Low levels of literacy skills among adults as a result of socio-economic background are a concern because this indicates that the disadvantages of low socio-economic status (SES) in childhood are difficult to overcome and can continue into adulthood (Chmielewski, 2018). Barratt-Pugh and Rohl (2015) cite Thomson (2000) who notes that in some early childhood settings '*particular literacy practices are privileged over others, potentially disadvantaging children who are not familiar with school-based literacy practices*' (p. 4).

A key issue in the family literacy literature has been around the deficit notion of families and communities when it comes to family literacy. Research has consistently found that most children engage in literacy activities in the context of their families and communities (see, for example, Anderson et al., 2010). That is, it has been argued that deficit-thinking regarding the prevalence of literacy in disadvantaged homes underpins many family literacy initiatives (Nichols et al., 2009). Furthermore, Compton-Lilly (2007, pp. 75) concludes, 'reading [or literacy] in schools is contingent upon a complex set of practices and ways of being that often fail to reflect the rich strengths and abilities that are valued in home communities'. Marsh (2003) found that while families imported literacy practices from school, the traffic was one-way and there was very little evidence of the school taking up literacy practices from the home.

2.3 Existing research on the effects of family literacy programmes

Existing research identifies that partnership between school, home and communities can have positive outcomes for children's education (Chmielewski, 2018; NPC, 2018; Barratt-Pugh and Rohl, 2015; Carpentieri, 2013; Baker, 2013; NALA, 2010, 2011; Saracho, 2008; Wagner et al., 2002). In the sections below we pay particular attention to the effects of family literacy programmes rather than programmes that seek to enhance child development more generally.

The effectiveness of school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy

A number of studies have considered the effectiveness of school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy across different institutional (country) contexts. To date, the key focus of these studies has been the effects on children's outcomes. For the most part, few

interventions have been systematically evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs, and few have used comparison groups as well as a treatment group (Anderson et al., 2010; Purcell-Gates, 2000). Here, we provide a summary of the findings from some key evaluations in the US, Canada and the UK. For the most part, studies have found positive effects on children's academic and cognitive outcomes.

Using an experimental design in the US, Whitehurst et al. (1994) report no effect of an emergent literacy intervention (Head Start) on reading scores at the end of first or second grade, and conclude that there is a better fit between the objectives of the emergent literacy intervention and the nature of literacy outcomes in early elementary school. While children in the sample began formal reading instruction with relatively low levels of emergent literacy skills, they showed substantial gains with respect to national norms by the end of second grade. The Even Start Family Literacy Programme ran in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s until 2011/2012. This programme lost funding because of poor programme outcomes in a randomised experiment of participants and non-participants (St. Pierre et al., 2003, 2005). Positive outcomes were reported in an earlier study by Gambrell et al. (1995) in their evaluation of the Running Start Programme in nine US states.

A number of evaluations were undertaken in Canada. Saint-Laurent and Giasson (2005) conducted an experiment with treatment and control groups, using pre-and post-tests of children's performance in reading and writing in grade 1 (age six to seven). The intervention was a family literacy workshop which had three characteristics: (i) book reading with parents; (ii) support for writing activities; and (iii) home activities that complement in-class teaching. They found that the intervention had a positive effect on children's performance in both reading and writing, whereby children produced longer texts and used better vocabulary, sentence structure and spelling. The Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child programme in Canada focused on assisting parents in improving their own reading and writing skills while learning how to help their preschool children become successful learners. A quasi-experimental evaluation found that children in the treatment group had statistically significant gains in literacy achievement compared with children in a control group. Effects were found for children only and not for adults (Phillips et al., 2006 cited in Anderson et al., 2010). More recently, Purcell-Gates et al. (2012) measured the effects of Literacy for Life, an intergenerational programme for low literate immigrant and refugee families focused specifically on authentic (real-life) literacy activities. Pre- and post-tests of early reading ability and of the Canadian Adult Achievements tests revealed statistically significant gains for both adults and children.

In the UK, Swain et al. (2015), adopting a quasi-experimental design, report a positive effect of family literacy programmes on key stage 1 (age five to seven) children's reading scores, as children who attended the programmes made greater gains in reading than those who did not attend. Other studies in the UK have used randomised controlled designs. Hannon et al. (2019) explored the effects of participation in a family literacy initiative at pre-school stage on children's literacy. The study found post-programme gains on measures of emergent literacy and letter recognition, with greater gains for children from families where mothers have low levels of education. However, there was no evidence of persistent programme effects by age seven. Morris et al. (2019) used a cluster randomised controlled trial to test whether the effects of the Family Skills programme targeted at the parents of four- to five-year-old pupils with English as an additional language raised attainment. The study reported results that were not statistically significant.

Meta-analyses of evidence on family literacy interventions have often reported positive effects. Carpentieri et al. (2010) came to their conclusion that family literacy interventions have a stronger impact on children's literacy acquisition than most other educational interventions. Two meta-studies of family

literacy programmes in the UK and internationally found that both parents and children benefitted from their participation in these programmes (Brooks et al., 2008) and that the programmes have statistically significant and moderate to large effects on children's oral language skills and general cognitive abilities (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

The influence of family literacy initiatives on the development of effective family literacy activities with their children

While notable, a smaller body of research has focused on the influence of family literacy programmes on the development of effective family literacy practices in the home. Here, there are fewer studies that have systematically analysed the home literacy environment before and after attending a family literacy initiative, using pre- and post-test measures and/or treatment and control groups. In the section below we report on findings from this diverse body of research.

Morrow and Young (1997) in the US found positive effects for inner-city children from participation in a family literacy programme. Adopting an experimental design, children reported reading more often in their free time and reading more with adults. Findings from qualitative research in the US highlights how family literacy programmes can also make positive differences specific to parents' lives in terms of accessing support, enhancing psychosocial well-being and the acquisition of social capital (Prins et al., 2009). Steiner's (2014) mixed-method study of a family literacy intervention programme found that attendance by parents led to an increase in knowledge of effective storybook reading strategies.

In the UK Nutbrown and Hannon (2003) draw on the perceptions of children themselves, given the paucity of research from the child-voice. In their study they compared a group of children who had participated in a family literacy programme with a group of children who had not. The researchers conclude that programme participation has a modest but positive influence on family literacy practices. That is, children reported an increase in family literacy activities. In their quasi-experimental study, Swain et al. (2015) found significant improvements in parental attitudes towards reading and an increase in parental confidence upon completion of a family literacy course. However, there were no changes to reading behaviours, although the authors argued that reading behaviours can take a longer time period to change. Interestingly, the family literacy programmes that utilised the learning experiences and interests of parents were associated with greater positive changes in parents' attitudes towards reading and increases in parental understanding of school literacies.

In Canada Anderson and Morrison (2007) draw on the perceptions of parents and caregivers in order to evaluate a year-long family literacy programme that the parents and caregivers participated in with their four- and five-year-old children. Participants reported: (i) they understood expectations of school and felt better able to support their children's learning at home; (ii) they felt more comfortable in school and felt they had developed the capacity to advocate for themselves and their children; and (iii) they had developed important social networks to share knowledge and strategies that middle-class families tend to avail of and deploy (Lareau, 1987). Anderson et al. (2008) found that the parents with whom they had worked in a family literacy programme nearly 20 years earlier remembered the making visible of the early literacy pedagogy of the school as the most significant thing they learned.

The Australian-based study by Barratt-Pugh and Rohl (2015) of the Better Outcomes literacy programme tracked participating mothers' perceptions of the programme and related practices over a four-year period. They noted longer-term changes where mothers reported 'changing practices as their child matured over

the four years of the study and also their child's language- and literacy-related behaviours' (pp. 4). They also found that participants talked about additional benefits such as growing confidence and reinforcing emotional bonds between them and their child. They note this appears to be particularly important for mothers who reported feeling 'stupid' and/or 'unsure' about shared-reading before starting the programme (pp. 10).

These findings suggest that the benefits associated with family literacy programmes extend to both children and parents and to other areas of their personal lives such as their social and emotional development. There is evidence that family literacy programmes positively affect adult participants in terms of self-efficacy (Rodriguez-Brown, 2004) and developing social capital (Anderson and Morrison, 2007). Swain et al. (2014) term these 'the softer benefits' of family literacy programmes. They make the point that these 'softer benefits' generally seem to have been of less interest to policymakers, with parent perspectives often neglected. Yet research also highlights the significance of such interventions in the lives of parents.

The influence of family literacy initiatives on parent–teacher relationships

Compared with the outcomes examined above, very few studies consider the influence of family literacy programmes on parent–teacher relationships. In the UK Swain et al. (2015) report from their quasi-experimental study that as well as increases in parents' confidence and improved understanding of how reading is taught at school, there was also greater 'parent-school alignment' – or greater alignment between school and parental cultural expectations (See and Gorard, 2015) – as a result of attending family literacy programmes. In the same vein Pahl and Kelly (2005) argue that family literacy can be a 'third space' where families can engage in literacy from both home and school or in 'hybridized forms' borrowing from both contexts. Furthermore, Swain et al. (2015) report that programmes that focused on parents' own learning experiences and interests were associated with greater increases in parental understanding of school literacies – literacies valued in school settings. While they report closer parent relations with the school and a set of deeper parental understandings, they also report little evidence of change in the balance of partnership between parents and schools (Swain and Cara, 2018).

In Canada Anderson and Morrison (2007) found that parents felt more comfortable in the school setting upon completion of a family literacy course. They found that it promoted inter-subjectivity in that families and teachers began to develop much deeper understandings of each others' expectations and perspectives as they began to work together. Finally, in Germany positive outcomes have emerged from an evaluation of the Hamburg Family Literacy project 'FLY' (Rabkin et al., 2018). That is, parents in FLY schools feel more involved in their children's learning and are offered more opportunities to engage in school activities.

2.4 Existing research on the effects of family literacy programmes in Ireland

In this section we now briefly comment on the body of existing research on family literacy in Ireland. Research and policy are clear that parents/guardians and grandparents play a central role in children's literacy and language development and promote the development of family literacy (Byrne and O'Toole, 2017; Byrne and Smyth, 2010; DES, 2011, EU, 2012; Murray and Egan, 2014; NALA, 2010, 2011).

The findings of research conducted in the Irish context are discussed in depth by Morgan and O'Donnell (2016) and so are not elaborated upon here. Compared with the voluminous literature in other institutional contexts, research in the field of family literacy is in its relative infancy in the Irish context.

To date, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has conducted a number of research projects on the

topic of family literacy. One such study involved four family literacy projects in designated disadvantaged areas in Ireland (NALA, 2010). While the study did not extend to evaluate the effectiveness of the family literacy programmes, it measured the prevalence of various family literacy practices. Further research was funded by NALA and undertaken in 2010 by Hegarty and Feeley. This research sought to explore parents' attitudes, perceptions, knowledge and understanding of family literacy; parents' views and understandings of their role as the primary educators of their children and how such views and understandings are initiated in the home; and any perceived barriers to carrying out this role. The research also found that parents would value and welcome the opportunity to attend a family literacy programme. A third research study took place in 2011 (NALA, 2011), using qualitative methods with parents attending family literacy programmes and school staff who support the programmes. It documented family learning as it took place in local communities and the parents' perceptions of the benefits of family learning. The research found that family learning programmes can also help to break down barriers between the home and school and facilitate a better relationship between parents and school staff.

More recently, Kent and Pitsia (2018) compared the home learning environment of children aged three to five living in an area of socio-economic disadvantage to the home learning environment of a nationally representative sample of three-year-olds using the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data. The research showed that children living in the disadvantaged area had a lower frequency of engagement in home learning activities than the national average.

To date, family literacy policy in Ireland has been compared with such policy in other institutional contexts (Rose and Atkin, 2007a, 2007b). A body of research has also highlighted the reproduction of expected gender norms through family literacy initiatives (Morgan et al., 2009; Rose and Atkin, 2011; Rose, 2013), as well as the effectiveness of family literacy programmes in supporting the achievement of disadvantaged minority-ethnic groups (Travellers) in Ireland (Rose, 2013).

While these studies provide us with an indication of the prevalence of family literacy activities and indicate perceptions of the benefits of family literacy, no quantitative study has been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of family literacy interventions.

Finally, this evaluation aims to systematically evaluate parent/guardian perceptions prior to and after their participation in DF. It is anticipated that findings from this evaluation will contribute to existing literature and studies about family literacy interventions and offer recommendations to support literacy policymakers and practitioners to address the issues highlighted by current literacy research and practice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this section the methodological approach to the evaluation is set out. Here, we discuss the evaluation design, the sample, the research methods and instruments, and the analytic strategy employed in the evaluation.

3.2 Evaluation design

The study adopted a quantitative approach to the evaluation of Doodle Families (DF), whereby data were obtained from surveys administered to parents/guardians at three points in time. Adopting a quasi-experimental approach, the research instruments sought to capture both 'before participation' and 'after participation' in DF measures. Capturing 'before' measures – measures of the family literacy environment before participation in DF – made it possible to determine the possibility for change in the key dependent variables. Thus, we used this design strategy to capture the family literacy environment before participation in DF and analysed the data collected after participation to determine whether DF has had an influence on the family literacy environment immediately after participation but also six months after participation (in the short term). Thus, we collected data from the same participants at two points after the initial data collection period, adding a longitudinal dimension to the study.

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) works closely with a number of schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation nationally. CDI set the criteria for selection of schools and participants, and facilitators were responsible for selecting the parents/guardians and children that participated in DF. Ultimately, parents/guardians self-selected themselves and their children onto the programme. Since DF was based in nine DEIS² schools selected by CDI, the evaluation could not use a random allocation procedure to create a true experimental design. That is, for these reasons, random assignment to the experimental treatment (participation in DF) was not completely possible. However, in the quasi-experimental design, the 'before' measures still provide evidence of whether there were differences in 'Y' (the dependent variable – measures of the home literacy environment) that precede differences in 'X' (participation in DF).

The evaluation design did not strictly follow a traditional experimental design, in that a single group was the focus of the evaluation – parents/guardians who participated in DF and who agreed to participate in the evaluation. That is, on the request of CDI, a control group was not included in the design of the evaluation. Thus, the evaluation represents a 'before–after' study without a control group.

This type of 'before and after' quasi-experimental design seeks to provide evidence of concomitant variation between the independent variable (participation in DF) and the dependent variables (measures of the home literacy environment). The difference in the home literacy environment before and after participation in DF (both immediately after DF and in the short term) is taken as evidence of the effectiveness of the programme on a range of outcomes relating to the home literacy environment. In such research designs, the 'before' measures serve as a control in the sense that they are assumed to represent the family literacy environment in the absence of the experimental treatment – in this case participation in DF. Thus, each respondent serves as his/her own control.

² DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools.

However, we should also keep in mind that other influences may have operated between the 'before and after' measures and may contribute to the outcomes under investigation. That is, external events unrelated to the 'experimental treatment' (participation in DF) may lead to a change in position on the dependent variable (measures of the home literacy environment), as well as processes of growth and development. This design does not make it possible to separate such effects from those of the experimental treatment. While the day-to-day work of schools may have some influence on the outcomes in question (changes to the home literacy environment), it is reasonable to expect that schools will have been a relatively uniform influence across each of the research sites over time, and that such influence will not excessively 'contaminate' the quasi-experimental design presented here.

3.3. Sample

In this section we outline the population from which the sample was taken during the evaluation at each data collection point. The selection of schools and their characteristics are outlined, followed by a discussion of the selection of participants – both parents and children.

Selection of schools

The selection of schools from which the DF programme would run was undertaken by CDI. Each of the schools was selected because it was in an area of disadvantage. Some of the schools that were involved in this evaluation of DF, particularly those in the Tallaght area, already had some form of contact with CDI since 2007 – whether through programmes organised in the community or through pedagogical programmes. Schools could either opt in or opt out of delivering DF (or any other CDI initiative), and the following criteria were set by CDI regarding school involvement in DF:

- The family literacy programme should be the DF programme developed by CDI.
- The DF programme should run for eight weeks from October 2018 to December 2018. That is, the programme should be delivered in accordance to the manual in all aspects including the number of sessions, the content and the quality (CDI, 2018).
- The DF programme should include both parents and children: a 1-hour session per week for children in first class and a 15-minute session for parents.
- The school must participate in the internal CDI evaluation of DF, which includes a contract and the requirement of facilitators to administer before and after surveys to be completed by attending parents, children and facilitators themselves. The participating school must also provide financial returns (given that schools receive funding from CDI to support the running costs of DF) and an end-of-programme report (CDI, 2018).

For parents/guardians to be included in this independent external evaluation, they had to be participants on a DF programme in one of the selected schools and have given consent to participate in the evaluation. Involvement in the evaluation was not mandatory for parents/guardians or children. The evaluation proposal was reviewed and approved by Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee.

Given the timing (beginning of the school year) of DF, it was initially challenging for CDI to secure schools to participate in the evaluation. These challenges included (i) difficulty in recruiting schools to run DF; and (ii) difficulty securing enough children and parents (in particular) to participate at each school site. CDI initially sought to secure 8 schools to run DF with up to 15 children participating in each. Following DF facilitator training delivered by CDI for DF facilitators on 15 September 2018, 11 schools indicated an interest in participating. CDI, with the support of the evaluation team, secured nine schools for the current evaluation.

In total, DF was delivered to nine groups, through schools in disadvantaged areas of Dublin, all of which participated in the programme from October 2018 to December 2018. Five schools began the programme during the first week of October 2018, while the remaining four schools began the programme during the second week of October 2018. DF took place largely in parent rooms or other locations within each of the nine schools. The programmes were facilitated by specialised family literacy facilitators in three schools, while in the remaining schools either the home-school liaison officer or a teacher acted as facilitator.

Table 1 provides a summary of the key characteristics of the schools that delivered DF and participated in the evaluation. There is considerable homogeneity across the schools, given that each of the schools was co-educational and classified as being in an urban area, and all were under the patronage of a Catholic religious body. As shown in Table 1, each of the schools has a high concentration of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. Two schools held DEIS Urban Band 2 status, while the remainder were Urban Band 1 schools.³ The most common school size was in the '300–499' category, which represented 5 schools, while just 3 were classified as smaller schools in the '100–199' school size category. Four schools were located in the Dublin 24 region, two in the Dublin 12 region, two in the Dublin 7 region and one in the Dublin 8 region. Instruction was delivered through the medium of Irish in just one of the schools.

Selection of children

While the remit of this evaluation did not extend to an evaluation of the effectiveness of DF for the literacy outcomes of children, it is important to say something about the children who participated and about their selection. DF is a programme that targets children in first class, given the focus of the programme on 'emergent literacy' (CDI, 2018). In all, 95 first class children participated in DF across the 9 schools. The number of children that participated in each of the DF programmes is outlined in Table 1.

³ DEIS Urban Band 1 schools represent schools where the level of disadvantage is greatest.

Table 1: Characteristics of participating schools

Id	Number of children participated in DF	Number of parents	Literacy achievement groups of children	Number previously attended Doodle Den	School postal code	DEIS status ⁴	Programme began	Facilitation	School size		
									Girls	Boys	Total
School A	10	T1 = 4 T2 = 3 T3 = 4	High = 4 [40%] Moderate = 4 [40%] Low = 2 [20%]	8	Dublin 7	Urban Band 1	2nd week Oct	Facilitator	99	38	137
School B	10	T1 = 6 T2 = 5 T3 = 1	High = 2 [20%] Moderate = 4 [40%] Low = 4 [40%]	4	Dublin 24	Urban Band 1	1st week Oct	Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCL)	175	188	363
School C	10	T1 = 5 T2 = 5 T3 = 4	Low = 2 [20%] <i>Remainder unspecified</i>	0	Dublin 12	Urban Band 1	1st week Oct	Facilitator	194	201	395
School D	10	T1 = 8 T2 = 5 T3 = 7	<i>Mixed – but unspecified</i>	0	Dublin 8	Urban Band 2	2nd week Oct	Teacher/HSCL	178	170	348
School E	9	T1 = 8 T2 = 6 T3 = 4	<i>Unspecified</i>	4	Dublin 7	Urban Band 1	2nd week Oct	Facilitator	43	75	118
School F	8	T1 = 3 T2 = 3 T3 = 4	<i>Unspecified</i>	2	Dublin 24	Urban Band 2	1st week Oct	Teacher	195	141	336
School G	12	T1 = 11 T2 = 9 T3 = 5	High = 3 [25%] Moderate = 4 [33%] Low = 5 [42%]	4	Dublin 24	Urban Band 1	1st week Oct	HSCL	73	96	169
School H	11	T1 = 10 T2 = 8 T3 = 7	<i>Mixed – but unspecified</i>	0	Dublin 12	Urban Band 1	2nd week Oct	HSCL	52	63	115
School I	15	T1 = 9 T2 = 8 T3 = 8	High = 7 [47%] Moderate = 3 [20%] Low = 5 [33%]	4	Dublin 24	Urban Band 1	1st week Oct	HSLC	199	182	381

⁴ A classification of Urban Band 1 represents schools that have the greatest level of disadvantage.

The *DF Manual* (CDI, 2018) outlines the following selection method used to select children for DF:

- Facilitators first obtain parents'/guardians' consent to participate in the programme and inform them of what DF is about.
- The facilitator then completes a short questionnaire designed by CDI to evaluate the child's current literacy level. Children are referred to the programme by a class teacher or DF facilitator in consultation with parents, based on an identified literacy need, using the following method:
 - i. Letter identification – the child's ability to identify letters,
 - ii. Writing vocabulary – the child's ability to build a writing vocabulary,
 - iii. Phonemic awareness – the child's ability to discriminate the individual phonemes within words, and
 - iv. Text comprehension – the child's ability to construct meaning from text.
- These criteria are measured using a Likert-type scale (that is, from 0 = extremely poor to 10 = extremely good). CDI recommends a cross-section of need in order to maximise a positive learning environment where it is recommended that the composition of the DF programme will be as follows: (i) 60% of children will have scored between 0 and 20 (high literacy need); 25% of children will have scored between 21 and 30 (medium literacy need); and 15% of children will have scored between 31 and 40 (low literacy need).
- The child should also be comfortable with or have the capacity to participate in group activities.

It is important to note that the *DF Manual* (CDI, 2018) indicates that DF may not be appropriate for children with a developmental delay or children who are currently receiving additional support for literacy or speech and language (CDI, 2018, pp. 53).

As shown in Table 1, it is unclear whether this recommended range of literacy need was met by the participating schools. In four programmes, the composition of students by literacy need was not specified. In just two programmes, the share of participating children with high literacy need was greater than the share of participating children with medium/low literacy need, somewhat in line with the guidelines. In terms of the characteristics of the children that participated, just 1 child in School E had previously participated in a DF programme, and 26 children out of the 95 (27.3%) had previously attended Doodle Den (DD).

Selection of parents

The focus of this evaluation relates to changes in the home literacy environment; thus, parents are the key unit of analysis. As indicated above, DF is a family literacy programme, designed to be delivered in two components – including a one-hour session for parents/guardians each week of the programme for eight weeks. The *DF Manual* recommends that parents' sessions are to be delivered during the school day (CDI, 2018), and this was the timing of delivery for each of the groups.

Parents/guardians of children who participated in DF were the target respondents in the evaluation and were the unit of analysis. The formal selection of parents into DF was undertaken by the schools, and consent was obtained from the parents to participate in DF. The facilitators of each of the DF groups in each school offered support as gatekeepers for the research team. That is, while the research team was not responsible for the recruitment of parents onto the DF programme, participating parents/guardians were recruited to the evaluation with the help of the gatekeepers.

Recruitment of parents/guardians at Time 1 typically took the form of a member of the research team attending the first session of the DF parent component to brief participating parents/guardians about the evaluation and to seek consent to participate in the evaluation. Face-to-face data collection was the preferred method of survey administration because it typically receives the highest response rates (Ruel et al., 2018).

At this point, the challenges in gaining consent from parents/guardians to participate in the evaluation became evident. This was because (i) as shown in Table 1, not all parents/guardians of the children attending DF attended the programme; and (ii) not all parents gave consent to participate in the evaluation. The research team notified CDI of the lower than expected uptake of parents/guardians to the programme and to the evaluation. CDI responded by informing facilitators that schools may use supporting funds from CDI to incentivise parents/guardians to participate in DF. Some facilitators also responded by delivering the parent component a second time in order to increase participation. However, the response to low uptake by parents did vary across each of the sites. The research team also responded by visiting schools a number of times to administer surveys face to face in order to secure more parents/guardians in the evaluation.

3.4 Research instruments and measurements

Given that parents/guardians are the unit of analysis, the evaluation team has administered surveys with the same parents/guardians over three points in time:

- Time 1 (T1) represents the period **immediately before** parents/guardians/carers participated in DF (October 2018).
- Time 2 (T2) represents the period **immediately after** parents/guardians/carers completed DF (December 2018).
- Time 3 (T3) represents the period **6 months after** parents/guardians/carers completed DF (June 2019).

Surveys for parents attending DF

Surveys were used to collect data from parents/guardians at each of the three time points. The surveys consisted mainly of multiple-choice questions, but Likert-type scales were also used. The surveys included 31 questions at Time 1, 26 questions at Time 2 and 20 questions at Time 3. At Time 1, in 7 groups the surveys were distributed by the DF facilitator with the support of a member of the research team. In the two remaining programmes the DF facilitator distributed the surveys to parents/guardians. Surveys were for the most part completed during the parent component of the first session, where respondents were allocated approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey.

At Time 2, the majority of the surveys were distributed by the DF facilitator. Data collection at Time 3 was conducted in the same way – largely involving the DF facilitator distributing the parent survey and/or the research team making direct contact with parents/guardians.

Questions at Time 1 were devised to allow the research team to measure the home literacy environment before participation in DF and to capture some demographic background information. Measures of parent/guardian literacy activities were included in the survey at Time 1 as well as motivations to join DF and other attitudes towards family literacy. Specifically, the following areas were captured at Time 1:

- **Family demographics and resources** (age, relationship to child, family structure, parental educational qualifications, language spoken in the home, income difficulty of the household, number

of books in the home, previous school and interagency engagement, parental access to learning infrastructure, parental motivation for participation)

- **Parent/guardian literacy behaviours and attitudes** (parent/guardian reading habits, attitudes towards reading)
- **Parent/guardian literacy beliefs and understandings** (understanding of how school literacies are taught, confidence in children's literacy development, information networks, beliefs about the roles of parents/guardians and the school)
- **Child and family literacy activities** (child reading behaviour, child-led literacy in the home, shared reading activities, shared reading practices, shared literacy practices)

The questions selected for the survey were guided by and adapted from previous research conducted in the family literacy field by Swain et al. (2015), Sénéchal et al. (1998), Saracho (2000) as well as questions asked in the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) survey and guidelines from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for learning outcomes in first class. In their evaluation of the Doodle Den Literacy Programme, Biggart et al. (2012) also tapped into some of these measurements of the family literacy environment using the Family Literacy Questionnaire devised by Saracho (2000).

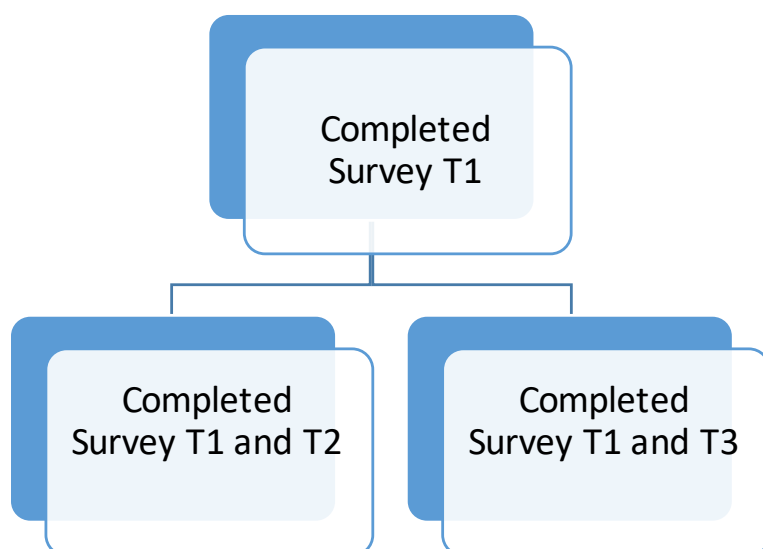
The selection of questions in the surveys at Time 2 and Time 3 sought to capture change in attitudes and beliefs regarding family literacy as well as changes in family literacy practices and child and family literacy activities. Questions regarding parental literacy beliefs and understandings and child and family literacy activities were captured at all time points. In addition, some new questions captured at Time 2 and Time 3 allowed the research team to explore the use of family literacy activities advocated by DF, including the frequency and timing of their use and the family members who were usually involved. A number of open-ended questions were also included in the surveys, in order to capture parent/guardian views and perspectives.

3.5 Analytic strategy

A key strength of a study that captures the same respondents over a period of time is its ability to measure change in outcomes at the individual level. That is, it provides the opportunity to observe individual patterns of change. Such data provide an opportunity for inference regarding the effect/influence of an intervention or exposure.

In this evaluation, we use exploratory analysis of the data to discover patterns of systematic variation across groups of parents/guardians. As illustrated by Figure 1, we make use of two cohorts – those who completed the surveys at T1 and T2 (immediately after DF) and those who completed the surveys at T1 and T3 (six months after DF). Comparison of change over time between these two cohorts allows us to determine the effectiveness of interagency working on family literacy immediately after DF and six months after participation.

Figure 1: Summary of cohorts



We adopt a derived variable approach,⁵ whereby a number of variables/measurements are averaged and statistical analysis are conducted. For the most part, scales were derived from a range of questions, which were then tested for reliability estimates (including Alpha (α) and Guttman's lambda-2 (λ_2)).

Using these derived measures, we focus largely on means over time. That is, the focus is on *change in the average response* between T1 and T2 and *change in the average response* between T1 and T3. We use summary statistics such as means and standard deviations to illustrate whether respondents are changing in a similar or different fashion. To determine if change over time reaches statistical significance, either paired sample t-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests are used. The paired sample t-test is a parametric statistical procedure used to determine whether the mean difference between two sets of observations is zero. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a non-parametric test which does not assume normality in the data and is particularly useful for the analysis of change among ordinal or continuous level variables.

In addition to calculating a p value, we also use effect size measures (Cohen's d). Using this effect size measure allows an expression of the effect size in terms of a 'real effect' or not. The thresholds are as follows:

- Small effect size if $d = 0.2$
- Medium effect size if $d = 0.5$
- Large effect size if $d = 0.8$

Thus, the use of effect sizes allows the researcher to contextualise a statistically significant finding. If two groups' means don't differ by 0.2 standard deviations or more, it is argued that the difference is trivial, even if it is statistically significant.

⁵ A limitation to the derived variable approach is that where there is incomplete data, subjects with partial data are excluded. This means that when using this approach, there may be selection bias because of exclusion of subjects with missing data.

3.6 Response, non-response and attrition

Response and non-response bias

A summary of the number of completed surveys is provided in Table 2. Here, we report that out of all the parents that participated in DF, 64 completed surveys at Time 1 (October 2018); 52 parents completed surveys at Time 2, 51 of whom had completed the survey at Time 1; and 44 completed the survey at Time 3, 43 of whom had completed the survey at Time 1. In all, 160 surveys were completed over the lifetime of the evaluation.

Table 2: Summary of data collection to date

Number of family literacy programmes delivered	9
Number of schools involved	9
Number of completed surveys at T1	64
Number of completed surveys at T2	52
Number of completed surveys at T3	44
Number of parents who completed T1 and T2 surveys	51
Number of parents who completed T1, T2 and T3 surveys	37
Number of parents who completed T1 and T3 surveys	43
Total number of completed surveys	160

Baseline data on all 95 parents/guardians who were targeted for participation in DF were not available to the research team, thus making it difficult to estimate whether non-response to the DF evaluation is randomly distributed or not – that is, whether there is non-response bias in the sample or not. This response rate contributes to the notion of parents as a ‘hard-to-reach’ population in research. More lead-in time is recommended to improve response rates in the future. In doing so, a research team can more meaningfully make contact with parents/guardians with the use of an advance letter, introducing parents/guardians to the research, allowing sufficient time to elapse after the advance letter has been sent out before meeting with parents/guardians to discuss participation. Further research should also measure the extent to which parents/guardians participate in DF, given that parent/guardian participation has been found to fluctuate in previous evaluations of family literacy initiatives (Hannon et al., 2006). Later, Chapter 4 compares participants at Time 1 using data from the GUI study – a nationally representative sample of nine-year-olds and their primary caregivers, to identify any potential under-representation in the data.

Out of the 95 children that participated in DF, 64 parents/guardians (67.3%) consented to participate in the evaluation and completed surveys at Time 1 in early October 2018. Non-participation in the evaluation at Time 1 is explained largely by parents/guardians not attending DF rather than because they refused to participate in the evaluation. In the DF evaluation the greatest number of parents/guardians who refused to participate in the evaluation were in School B, where three parents opted out of the evaluation.

While the response rate of 67.3% here lies within the recommended rate for maintaining representativeness, there can be a chance of bias for response rates of less than 70% (Ruel et al., 2018). When non-response is not randomly distributed throughout the sample, this can be taken as evidence of bias.

Previous research studies have also experienced low take-up of parent-focused components of family literacy initiatives (Hannon et al., 2006). Recruitment difficulties have been documented regarding Even Start programmes in the US (St. Pierre et al., 1995), and the ALBSU (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit) initiative (Poulson et al., 1997) in the UK.

Eight weeks later (late November, early December 2018), when DF concluded, data collection for Time 2 began. Data collection at Time 2 typically involved the DF facilitator administering the parent survey during Session 8 – the final parent component. In some cases a member of the research team also attended this final session to support the DF facilitator in administering surveys face to face. At Time 2, 52 parents completed the survey, representing 54.7% of the parents/guardians of the 95 children that participated in DF and 81.2% of the parents/guardians that completed surveys at Time 1.

Data collection at Time 3 was conducted by both the DF facilitators and the research team. The DF facilitator administered the survey and the research team made direct contact with parents/guardians by phone, as well as posting out surveys with stamped addressed envelopes for return. At this point, 44 parents/guardians completed the surveys, representing 46.3% of the parents/guardians of the 95 children that participated in DF and 68.7% of the parents/guardians that completed the surveys at Time 1.

Attrition

Attrition – the loss of respondents in a repeated measures study – is also a feature here, and is a key characteristic of studies that capture the same respondents over time. Between T1 and T2 the attrition rate was 18.8%, and it was 31.3% between T1 and T3. The attrition between Time 1 and Time 2 is explained largely by parents withdrawing from DF rather than because they refused to participate in the evaluation. Previous research has found drop-out rates from family literacy initiatives to be high in similar studies, reporting between 35% and 50% drop-out (Gomby et al., 1993; Baker et al., 1998; Philliber et al., 1996; Tao et al., 1998; Wagner et al., 2002). The attrition between T1 and T3 is possibly explained by parents withdrawing from DF and from the evaluation, but also by the timing of the data collection – the end of the school year.

In the section below we explore the patterns of non-response to examine whether we have captured the views of different groups of parents for each wave of data collection.

Analysis of attrition

As indicated above, while baseline data on all parents/guardians who participated in DF were not available to determine the extent of non-response bias, it is possible to analyse patterns of attrition. Here, we compare the characteristics of those who responded at Time 1 with the characteristics of those who responded at both Time 1 and Time 2 and those who responded at both Time 1 and Time 3 (see Table A1 in the Appendix). Here, we can examine if attrition is randomly distributed throughout the sample (no pattern) and if the repeated measures cohorts still match the original cohort of parents that were captured at Time 1.

Between T1 and T2, attrition was evident across all groups, with the exception of School C. The reduced sample broadly matches the T1 sample, yet there are some noticeable departures. The sample that completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2 differs in some (non-statistically significant) ways from the original sample at Time 1. While the majority of study children at Time 1 were female, there is a more equal distribution of males and females in the sample who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2. This

sample is marginally younger and marginally better educated. There are fewer single-parent family units, and the sample members perceive themselves to be under less economic difficulty than the sample at Time 1. There are also fewer native English speakers in the sample that completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2. There were few differences in other domains. These findings suggest that while not statistically significant, attrition may be related to the degree of advantage in families – those who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2 were marginally more advantaged than those who completed the survey at Time 1 only.

Attrition was particularly evident regarding School B by Time 3. The research team and the facilitator made several attempts to improve response rates across all schools. Despite this, we find that the reduced sample size is more in line with the T1 sample. There is, however, one (non-significant) notable exception, whereby the share of lone parents/guardians is lower among those who completed the survey at T1 and at T3. In this sample, other than family structure, there is little evidence of attrition bias.

It is also evident among both cohorts (those who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2 and those who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 3) that a higher share of parents/guardians were motivated to participate in DF because they wanted to learn more about how to support their child, while fewer were concerned with their own literacy. This suggests that a latent variable – motivation – is related to participation in the evaluation.

4. Family resources to support the development of children's literacy

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we provide baseline information on the parents/guardians that participated in Doodle Families (DF) at Time 1, their relationship to the child, age, educational qualifications, economic difficulty experienced by the family, the language spoken at home, the number of books in the home, and previous attendance on family learning courses. These characteristics can be regarded as family resources that serve to enable or constrain the development of children's literacy. The characteristics of the parent/guardian participants at T1 of the study are presented in the Appendix. This information is derived from surveys that were administered prior to participation in DF.

4.2 Demographics and family structure

As indicated in the Appendix, the vast majority of the respondents were female, with few males participating in DF: 92% were female, the majority of whom were mothers, and 6% were grandmothers. These findings are very much in line with previous studies (e.g. Hannon et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2009; Rose and Atkin, 2007b; Rose and Atkin, 2011; Swain et al., 2014) that highlight the gendered nature of participation in family literacy programmes. In terms of family structure, the majority (73%) of respondents were living with a spouse or a partner, while just over a quarter (27%) were lone parent families.

At Time 1, the mean age of respondents was 36.75, ranging from 24 to 71. The vast majority (70%) were aged between 21 and 40, 21% were aged between 41 and 50, and 6% were 51 years or older (see Appendix).

Respondents were asked about the number of dependent children (children under the age of 18) living in the household. The mean number of dependent children was 2.5, ranging from 1.0 to 6.0; 88.3% had 2 or more dependent children living with them in the household, over half had 2 dependent children (51.7%), and over one-fifth had 3 dependent children (see Appendix).

At Time 3, four respondents (9.5%) indicated that their child receives SNA (special needs assistant) supports.

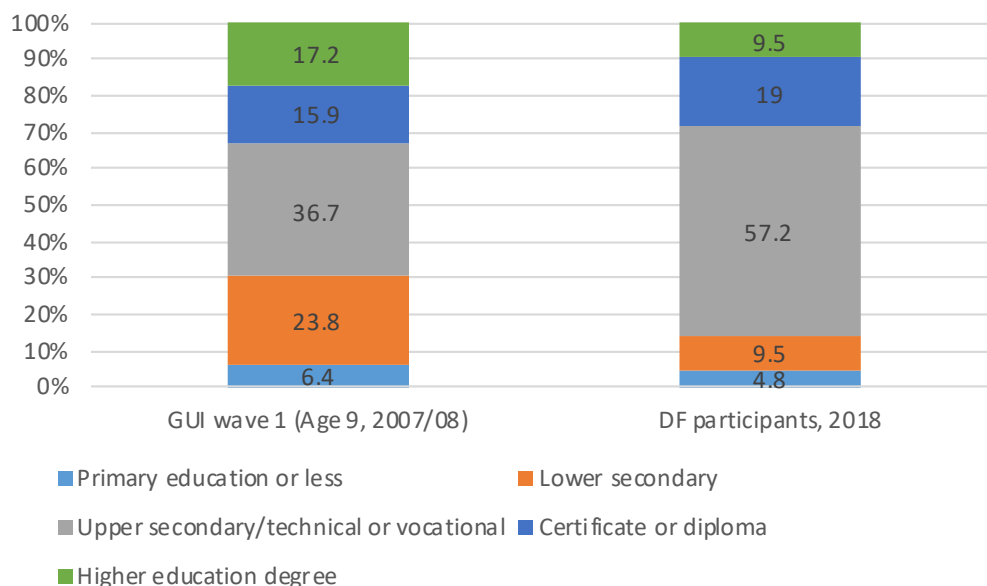
4.3 Educational qualifications

As shown in the Appendix, almost 14% of respondents indicated that they had very low levels of education – lower secondary or less – with 27% having completed the Leaving Certificate or equivalent, 30% having achieved a technical or vocational qualification, 19% having achieved a certificate or diploma, and almost 10% having achieved a higher education qualification.

A comparison of the educational level of respondents was made with corresponding nationally representative data using the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) child cohort, when children were aged nine (see Figure 1). The distribution of parental education is quite similar across the cohorts, though with some notable differences. Given the concentration of disadvantage associated with the schools selected for the DF evaluation, as expected, those in the DF cohort had lower rates of higher education completion than those in the GUI sample (9.5% compared with 17.2%).

The most frequently occurring (modal) category of education was 'Upper Secondary/Technical or Vocational' for both groups (see Figure 2). Well over half (57%) of DF respondents had this level of education compared with just over a third (36.7%) of GUI primary caregivers. Yet, surprisingly, parents/guardians with very low levels of education (lower secondary or less) appear to be somewhat under-represented among DF parents, suggesting some non-response bias among the DF respondents at Time 1.

Figure 2: Distribution of parental education levels: comparison with GUI data

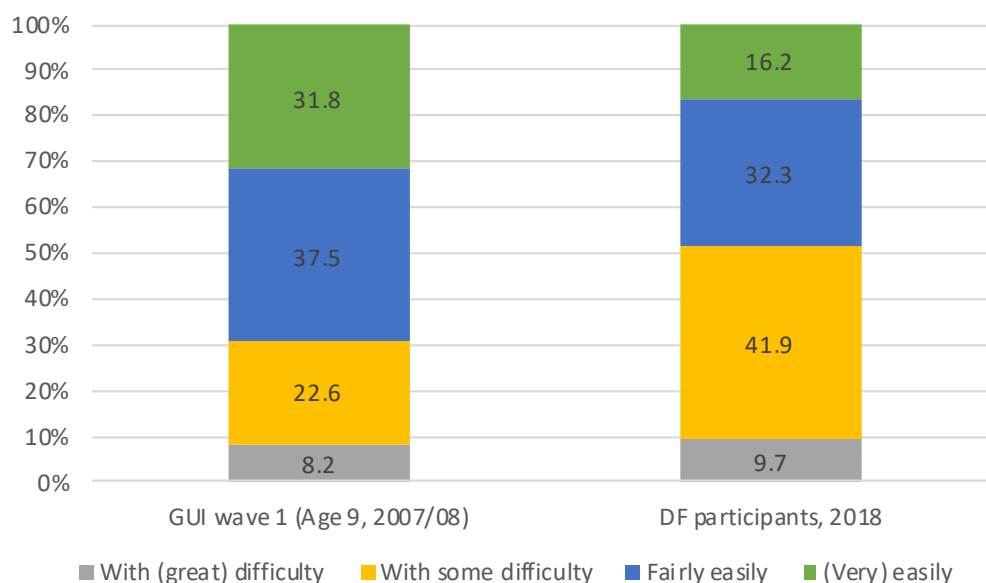


4.4 Language spoken in the home

Both educational qualifications and language spoken in the home are key variables in the family literacy literature. Just over three-quarters (76%) of respondents are native English speakers, while 24% are native speakers of a language other than English. This is considerably higher than the 5.1% of parents in the GUI nine-year-old cohort (not shown here). Among DF parents/guardians, one-fifth (20.7%) of parents/guardians speak a language other than English at home with the child.

4.5 Income difficulty of household

Respondents were asked about the degree of financial difficulty in the household with the following question: 'Concerning your household's total monthly or weekly income, with which degree of ease or difficulty is the household able to make ends meet?' The responses are shown in Table A1 in the Appendix and illustrated by Figure 3. Here, we also make a comparison with the parents of nine-year-olds using the GUI child cohort. While the distribution of household income difficulty is remarkably similar across the cohorts, there are some differences which suggest the above-average levels of disadvantage among the DF sample, as per our expectations. That is, the share of families experiencing 'difficulty' or 'great difficulty' is greater in the DF cohort compared with those in the GUI child cohort.

Figure 3: Distribution of household income difficulty levels: comparison with GUI data

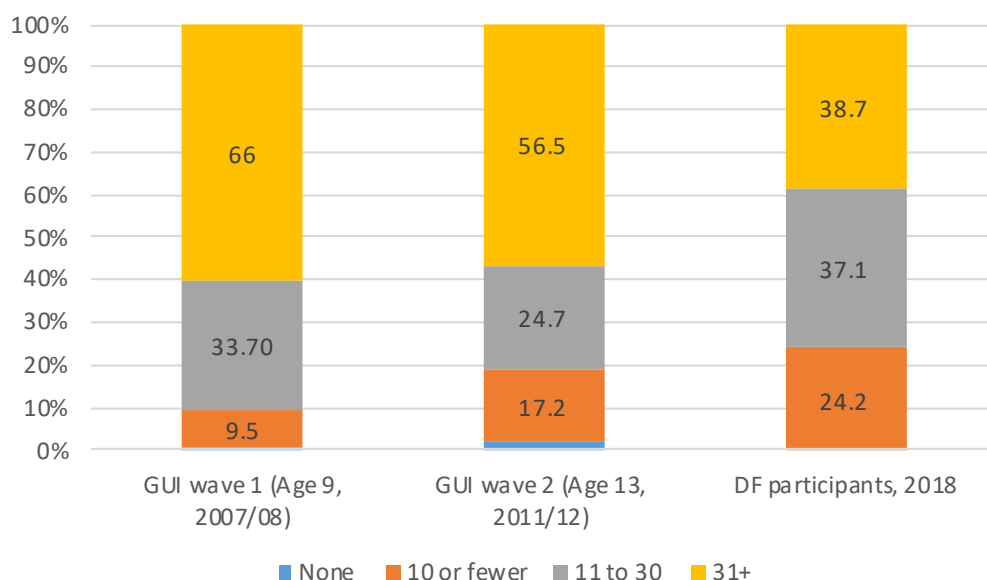
4.6 Number of books in the home

Number of books in the home is also a common measure used in the family literacy literature. Respondents were asked to indicate 'Approximately how many books are in your home today? (Please include library books, e-books, but do not count magazines, newspapers)'. Table 3 shows that while there are no families that do not have any books for children in the home, almost 10% of respondents had no books for adults in the home. Some of the families that took part in DF have many books for children in the home – over one-third (38.7%) indicated that they have more than 30 books in the home.

Table 3: Number of adult and child books in the home

	Books for Adults		Books for Children	
	N	%	N	%
None	6	9.8	0	0.0
Fewer than 10	25	41.0	15	24.2
10–20	14	23.0	14	22.6
21–30	7	11.5	9	14.5
More than 30	9	14.8	24	38.7

The number of books for children in the home among the DF sample was again compared with data from the nationally representative GUI study (Figure 4). Here, we find that compared with the national average of children when they are aged 9 and 13, the families that participate in DF have a smaller number of children's books in the home. While two-thirds (66%) of 9-year-olds had 30 or more books in the home, this was the case for just over one-third (38.7%) of the DF sample.

Figure 4: Distribution of children's books in the home: comparison with GUI data


4.7 Previous school and interagency engagement

Respondents were asked a number of questions regarding their involvement with the school and involvement with the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), and also about previous attendance on family literacy programmes. Specifically, respondents were asked, 'Have you ever helped out in a primary school classroom at school?', 'Have you ever attended another programme that focuses on family literacy?' and 'Have you attended other CDI programmes in the community?' Part of the rationale for asking these questions was to estimate if DF is attracting parents that would otherwise be less directly involved in school and in the community and to determine the effectiveness of school and interagency engagement on the development of family literacy practices.

Table 4: Parental involvement with school and CDI

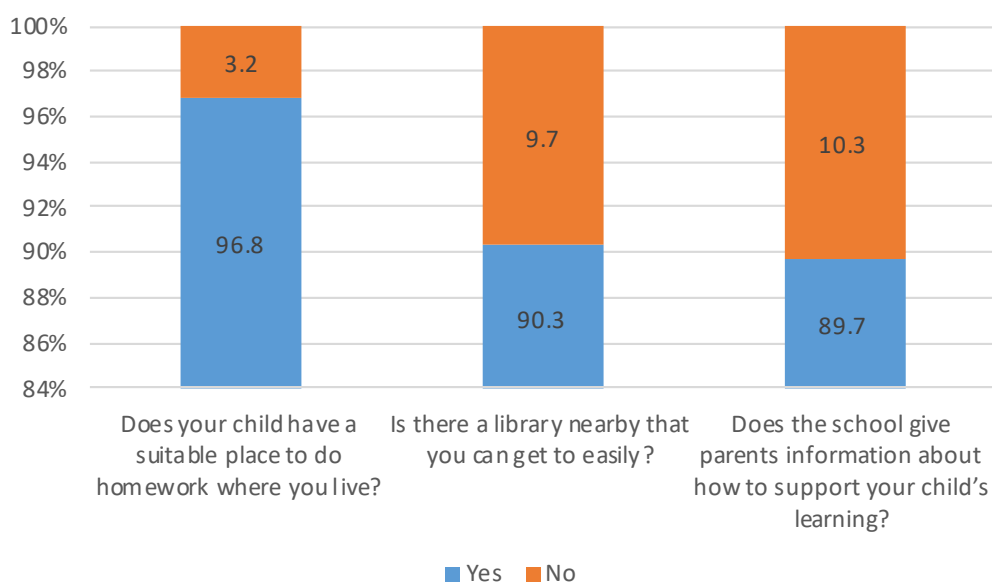
	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Have you ever helped out in a primary school classroom at school?	17	27.9	44	72.1
Have you ever attended another programme that focuses on family literacy?	16	26.2	45	73.8
Have you attended other CDI programmes in the community?	5	8.2	56	91.8

It would appear that DF is successful in attracting these parents, given that Table 4 shows that just over a quarter (27.9%) had previous involvement in a school classroom, just over a quarter (26.2%) had previously attended another programme on family literacy and just 8.2% had attended another CDI programme in the community. Furthermore, at Time 3, respondents were asked, 'Have any of your children previously participated in either Doodle Den or DF?' Just over one-third (34.1%) had previously attended one of the programmes, while two-thirds (66.9%) had not.

4.8 Parental access to learning infrastructure

Respondents were also asked about their access to resources that are known to promote learning – having a library in the locality, having a suitable physical space in the home to do homework, and receiving information from schools about literacy development. The results are shown in Figure 5. In each of these domains, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they have access to these resources. However, a small share of parents/guardians (3.2%, $n = 2$) indicated that their child does not have a suitable place to do homework, 9.7% ($n = 6$) indicated that there is not a library in the locality, and 10.3% perceived that the school does not provide parents with information about how to best support their child in their learning.

Figure 5: Parental access to learning infrastructure



4.9 Parent/guardian motivation for participation

Finally, respondents were asked, 'Why did you join the DF programme?' As indicated by Table 5 below, the majority of respondents indicated that their participation is associated with an intention to improve knowledge of how to improve family literacy and pedagogical knowledge. A very high share of parents (88.9%) wanted to be more involved in their child's school life and education, and over three-quarters (76.2%) wanted to learn how to help their child with homework and to learn about how the school teaches the child to read and write (73%). Just over half (55.6%) wanted to increase their confidence in helping their child with homework. Fewer parents/guardians were motivated to participate in order to improve their own literacies and confidence.

Table 5: Parental reasons for participating in DF

	N	%
To be more involved in my child's school life and education	56	88.9
To learn how to help my child with his/her homework	48	76.2
To learn how the school teaches my child to read and write	46	73.0
To increase my confidence in helping my child with his/her homework	35	55.6
To improve my own writing	16	25.4
To increase my confidence in my own literacy skills	19	30.2
To improve my own reading	15	23.8

4.10 Summary

This chapter provides baseline information on the parents/guardians that participated in DF at Time 1. In summarising the characteristics of families participating in DF we find that DF is serving a diverse range of families in terms of demographics, education level, language spoken in the home, economic circumstances and availability of existing literacy resources in the home. Clearly, DF is successful in attracting a diverse range of parents/guardians when it comes to non-native English speakers and those who have not previously engaged with CDI or been actively involved with the school.

What is of particular interest is the gendered nature of participation in DF – almost all participants were female, with few males (fathers/grandparents) taking part. The roll-out of future DF programmes should attempt to reach greater gender balance among participants. This is important, given that previous research in the Irish context and beyond has highlighted the reproduction of expected gender norms through family literacy initiatives (Morgan et al., 2009; Rose and Atkin, 2011; Rose, 2013). More flexible modes of delivery may need to be considered to better capture opportunities to develop family literacy within families.

While greater levels of disadvantage among DF respondents at Time 1 are evident compared with the national average, particularly in terms of economic situation and number of books in the home, there was some evidence to suggest bias in the sample at Time 1 in terms of education level. That is, parents/guardians with very low levels of education appear to be under-represented among the DF sample. While issues of non-participation and non-response are discussed in the previous chapter, this finding draws our attention to the need for more careful planning when recruiting parents/guardians for DF.

The following chapter considers parent/guardian perspectives on the effectiveness of interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy.

5. How effective is school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy?

5.1 Introduction

In this section we draw on the findings from the surveys to determine the effectiveness of school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy, from the parent/guardian perspective. In doing so, we seek to examine if parents/guardians perceive any change in children's reading at home and reading activities, children's digital literacy, and emergent literacy. Findings are presented for the two samples – the first sample represents those who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2, while the second represents those who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 3.

5.2 Reading at home: incidence and frequency

Analysis of the survey data at all time points reveals a high incidence of children reading at home.¹ That is, the vast majority (96–97%) of respondents at each of the three time points reported that their child reads at home.

While the majority of respondents indicated that the child reads with family members (mother, father, grandparent, siblings), immediately after participation in Doodle Families (DF) 4 out of 51 parents/guardians (8%) indicated that the child reads alone, while this was the case for 7 out of 43 parents/guardians (16%) in the short term.

However, it was very clear from the parent/guardian comments that children have very different experiences of reading at home. Some comments which led to this observation include:



'[My child] gets very upset [when reading], no confidence.'

'He reads alone but I help him if there are some difficult words.'

'Sometimes she reads, but not difficult books.'

'Prefers to read on her own and asks if she's reading it correctly.'



Parents/guardians were also asked at each of the time points about the frequency of reading their child engages in at home by the question, 'How often does your child read at home?' As shown by Table 6, before DF 44% of parents/guardians reported that their child reads 'every day'. This had increased to 56.3% of those who completed the survey at Time 2, but dropped to 34.9% of those who completed the survey at Time 3.

¹ At each of the time points, parents were asked, 'Does your child read at home?' If they answered yes, they were then asked to indicate with whom the child reads.

Table 6: Frequency distribution of children's reading

	% at T1	% at T2	% at T3
Never	2.0	0.0	0.0
Sometimes	18.0	14.6	23.3
Frequently	36.0	29.2	41.9
Every Day	44.0	56.3	34.9
	100	100	100

The longitudinal data offer an insight into the persistence of reading every day among children over time – both immediately after DF and in the short term. The results are shown in Table 7. The frequency of reading 'every day' increased during the DF programme, as 43.1% of parents/guardians indicated that their child was reading every day before attending DF and this increased to 52.9% by the end of the programme. However, this pattern was not observed in the longer term, as it decreased to 35.7% six months after the programme ended (see Table 7).

Table 7: Changes in children's reading

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2 cohort) %	Short term (T1 and T3 cohort) %		Immediately after DF (T1 and T2 cohort) Mean (SD)	Short term (T1 and T3 cohort) Mean (SD)
% reading every day before DF	43.1	44.2	Mean score before DF	3.22 (.81)	3.16 (.88)
% reading every day after DF	52.9	35.7	Mean score after DF	3.42 (.73)	3.12 (.77)
Difference	+9.8	-8.5%		.2	-0.04

Statistical tests (Wilcoxon signed-rank tests) were conducted to compare the mean frequency of reading before and after attending DF – immediately after DF and in the short term. The test revealed that participation in DF did not elicit a statistically significant change in the frequency of reading by children either immediately after DF ($Z = -1.652$, $p = .098$) or in the short term ($Z = -.339$, $p = .734$).

The survey also sought to capture change in child-led reading behaviour in the home over time. Parents were asked at each of the time points, 'How often does your child ask for somebody to read to him/her?' While the share of children asking to be read to 'very often' increased from 17.6% of respondents at Time 1 to 27.5% of respondents at Time 2, it reduced again to 16.3% of respondents by Time 3 (see Table 8).

Table 8: Frequency distribution of child-led reading

	% at T1	% at T2	% at T3
Never	9.8	5.9	2.3
Seldom	9.8	15.7	9.3
Sometimes	35.3	29.4	41.9
Often	27.5	21.6	30.2
Very Often	17.6	27.5	16.3
	100	100	100

As before, the strength of the longitudinal data is that they offer an insight into change in the frequency of child-led requests for reading over time. However, based on a statistical test (Wilcoxon signed-rank test), results show no change in the frequency of child-led requests for reading in both the short term and in the longer term, as shown in Table 9. The test revealed that participation in DF did not elicit a statistically significant change in the frequency of child-led reading requests either immediately after DF ($Z = -1.028$, $p = .304$) or in the short term ($Z = -.214$, $p = .831$).

Table 9: Changes in child-led reading requests

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2 cohort) %	Short term after DF (T1 and T2 cohort) Mean (SD)		Immediately after DF (T1 and T2 cohort) Mean (SD)	Short term after DF (T1 and T2 cohort) Mean (SD)
% asking often/very often for somebody to read with before DF	45.1%	46.1%	Mean score before DF	3.33 (1.1)	3.45 (1.06)
% asking often/very often for somebody to read with after DF	49.1%	45.3%	Mean score after DF	3.49 (1.2)	3.48 (.969)
Difference	4.0%	-0.8%		-.157	-0.03

5.3 Parent/guardian perceptions of children's reading activities

Respondents were asked at each of the time points about the types and frequency of reading that their children engaged in. These questions in the survey were adopted from the work of Olivia Saracho (2000), who designed a research instrument to assess the perceptions of families of their young children's literacy acquisition. The responses to these items for each survey are set out in the Appendix in Table A2.

A review of the findings reveals that habitual daily reading activities before and after DF are largely dependent on school-related reading materials (student homework assignments) and traditional storybooks. That is, over 40% of parents/guardians at Time 1 indicated that their child reads these types of reading materials – storybooks and/or student homework assignments – every day.

In order to estimate change as a result of participation in DF, a scale was derived from each of these literacy activities. Using this measure, higher scores indicate a lower frequency of these activities taking place, while a lower score indicates a greater frequency. As shown in Table 10 below, reading scores were higher both immediately after participation and in the short term.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to test the statistical significance of these findings. The results show no evidence to suggest that reading scores were statistically significantly greater immediately after DF ($t(50), 1.386, p = .177$) or in the short term ($t(41), 1.719, p = .093$).

Table 10: Changes in reading scores

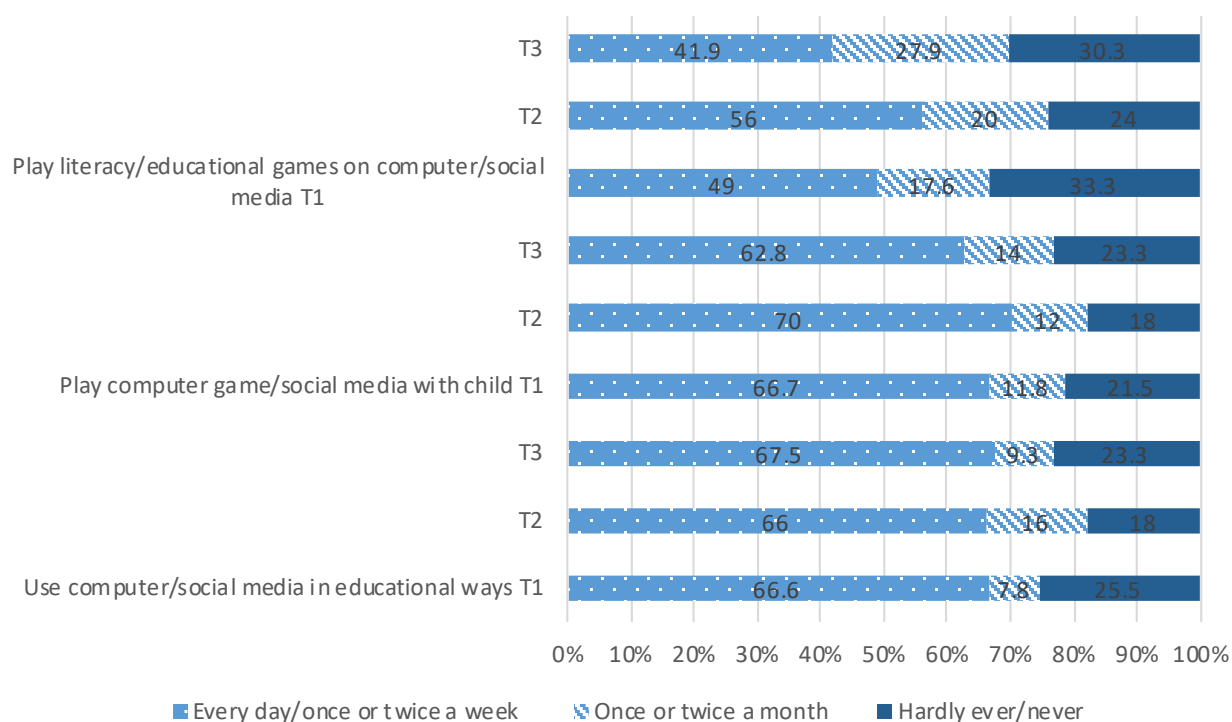
	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2 cohort)	Short term (T1 and T3 cohort)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Reading score before DF	46.2 (11.9)	47.6 (9.1)
Reading score after DF	43.7 (7.7)	44.5 (9.3)
Difference	+2.49	+3.1

5.4 Parental perception of children's digital literacy

This study was also concerned with the nature and use of literacy in the home, including digital literacy. As reported by Marsh et al. (2017, pp. 58) 'initiation into literacy as a social practice is initiation into the practices of digital literacy'. Parents/guardians at both times were asked about the frequency of the use of digital technology by the child in the home.

We find that the use of technology is clearly a feature of children's daily lives (see Figure 6). For example, parents/guardians were asked if their child uses computers or social media in educational ways. Before and after participation in DF, approximately two-thirds of parents/guardians indicated that this occurred almost every day or a couple of times a week.

Figure 6: Frequency of digital literacy use



Respondents were also asked about the frequency with which children play literacy/educational games on computers or social media. Before participation in DF, almost half (49%) of parents indicated that this occurred almost every day or a couple of times a week. After participation in DF, this increased to over half of parents (56%), suggesting some redirection of the use of technology for digital literacy. However, 6 months after participation, this reduced to 41.9%.

Finally, parents/guardians were also asked about the frequency with which they play computer games or social media games with the child. Before participation in DF, just over two-thirds of parents indicated that this occurred almost every day or a couple of times a week, and this rose to 70% after participation in DF. However, 6 months after participation, this reduced to 62.8%.

As in previous analyses, we summed up these digital literacy practices to create a scale indicating digital literacy use. Using this measure, higher scores indicate a lower frequency of these activities taking place, while a lower score indicates a greater frequency.

The results are presented in Table 11, and it would appear that immediately after participation in DF the mean digital literacy score is lower, suggesting greater use of digital literacy, while the mean digital literacy score is greater six months after participation, suggesting less use of digital literacy.

The results of the paired sample t-test showed that children's digital literacy scores at Time 1 and Time 2 were strongly and positively correlated ($r = .433$, $p = .002$), but the difference in mean scores before and immediately after was not statistically significant ($t = (49), 1.207$, $p = .233$). The difference in mean scores before and six months after participation was also not statistically significant ($t(41), 1.719$, $p = .093$).

Table 11: Changes in scores

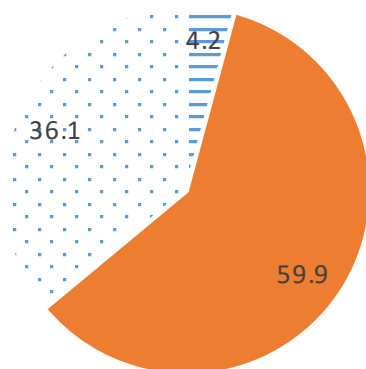
	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Score before DF	7.6 (2.6)	7.7 (2.5)
Score after DF	7.0 (3.1)	8.1 (3.2)
Difference	.54	-0.4

5.5 Parental perceptions of changes in children’s emergent literacy

Parental responses immediately after DF suggest that the majority of parents felt that DF had a positive influence on their child’s emergent literacy. In this section we explore if parents perceive any change in their child with regard to oral language and storytelling, reading, writing and their school experience more generally between Time 1 and Time 2.

Respondents were asked at Time 2, ‘Have you noticed any changes in your child?’ As illustrated by Figure 7, the majority of parents/guardians indicated some change in their child since participation in DF. Over half (59.9%) reported ‘some change’ and over one-third (36.1%) reported ‘a lot of changes’. Just 4% indicated that they had not noticed any change in their child.

Figure 7: Perceived change in child

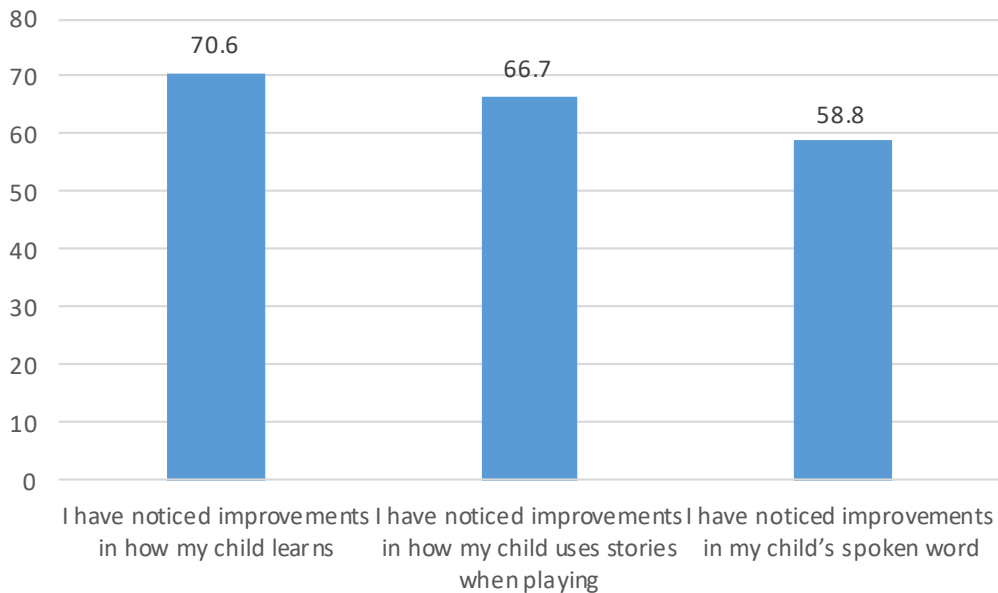


- I have not noticed any change in my child
- I have noticed some changes in my child
- I have noticed a lot of changes in my child

Oral language and storytelling

Specifically, respondents were asked about perceived changes in oral language and storytelling immediately after DF. As shown by Figure 8, the vast majority (70.6%) noticed an improvement in how their child learns, two-thirds (66.7%) noticed improvement in how their child uses stories when playing and 58.8% of parents indicated an improvement in their child's spoken word.

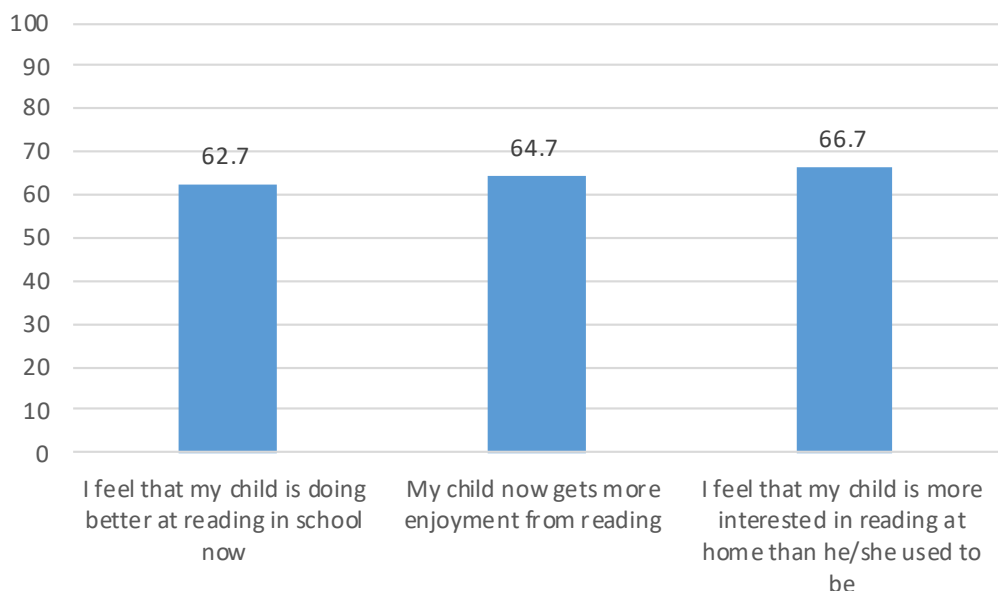
Figure 8: Perceived changes in oral language and storytelling



Reading

Respondents were also asked immediately after DF about changes in the reading behaviour of children. As illustrated by Figure 9, 66.7% of parents agreed with the statement, 'I feel that my child is more interested in reading at home than he/she used to be', 64.7% agreed that 'My child now gets more enjoyment from reading' and 62.7% agreed that 'I feel that my child is doing better at reading in school now'.

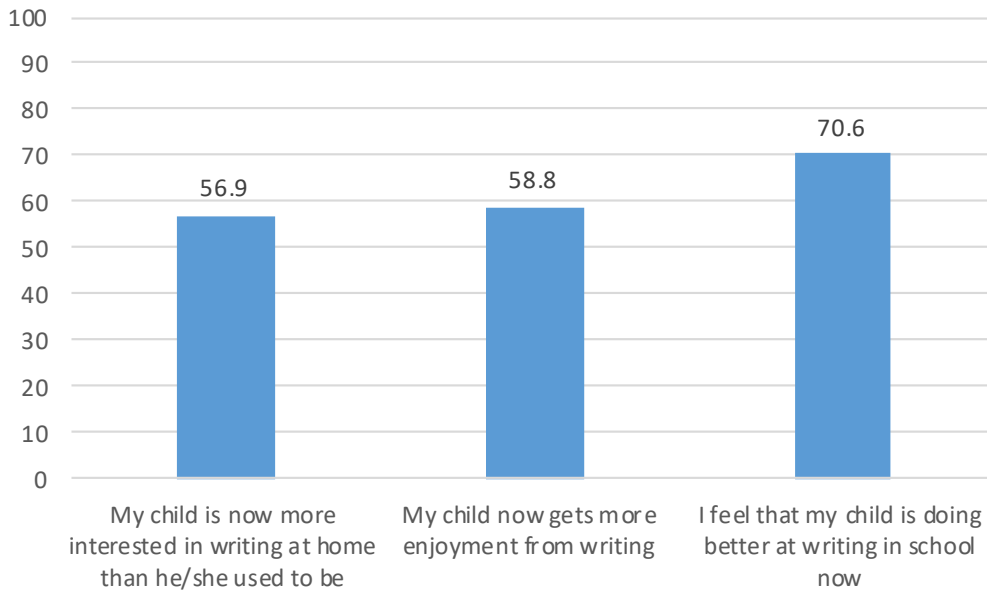
Figure 9: Perceived changes in reading behaviour



Writing

At Time 2, respondents were also asked about changes in their child regarding writing. Figure 10 shows that just over half of parents (56.9%) agreed that 'My child is now more interested in writing at home than he/she used to be' and 'My child now gets more enjoyment from writing' (58.8%), while 70.6% agreed that 'I feel that my child is doing better at writing in school now'.

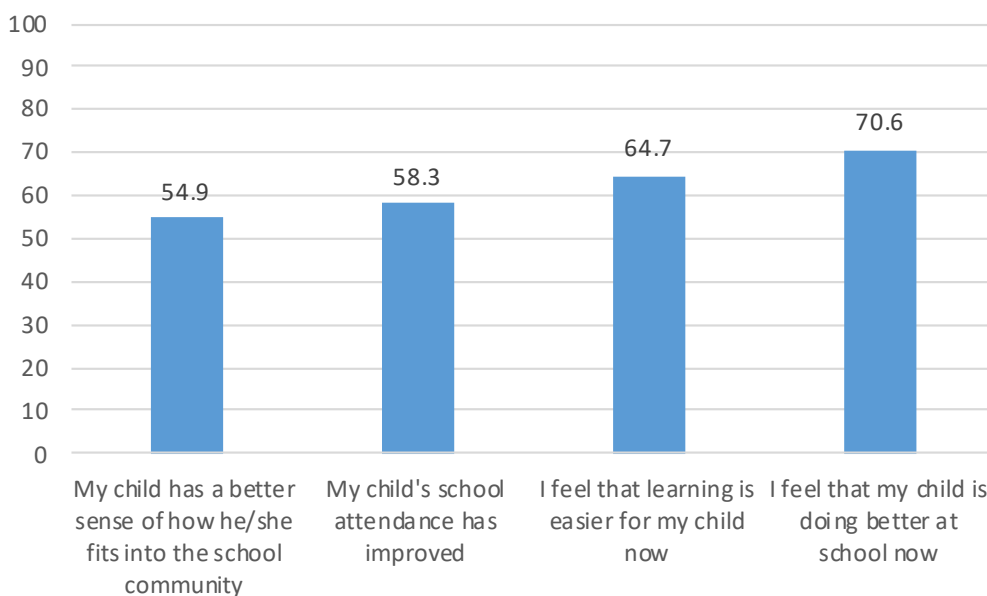
Figure 10: Perceived changes in writing behaviour



School experience and attendance

Parents/guardians were asked at Time 2 about changes in their child's school experience more generally (Figure 11). Just over half (54.9%) agreed that 'My child has a better sense of how he/she fits into the school community', and school attendance was perceived to have improved by 58.3%. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) agreed that 'I feel that learning is easier for my child now' and 70.6% agreed that 'I feel that my child is doing better at school now'.

Figure 11: Changes in experience of school



5.6 Summary

This chapter draws on the findings from the surveys to determine the effectiveness of school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy. While the measurement of the development of children's literacy as a result of participation in DF was beyond the remit of this evaluation, here we sought to examine changes before and after attending DF on parent/guardian perceptions of the development of children's literacy.

Analysis of before and after measures, both immediately after DF and in the short term, led us to conclude that there is no change in the frequency of reading in the home, no change in child-led reading behaviour in the home, no change in the frequency of habitual daily reading in the home, and no change in digital literacy practices. That is, there was no evidence to suggest that participation in DF had statistically changed parent/guardian perceptions of the development of children's literacy.

However, it is important to note that 96% of parents before attending DF indicated that their child was already involved in reading at home. The descriptive data suggest an over-reliance on school-related reading materials before and after attending DF. Thus, we recommend that any further DF programme seek to increase the scope of reading materials used by children.

The use of technology to promote literacy is increasingly being highlighted in the family literacy and curriculum literature, given that research often finds that children are immersed in a range of multimedia, multimodal practices that also involve extensive engagement with other family members (Marsh et al., 2017; Burnett et al., 2014). Thus, reading and writing practices are increasingly mediated by new technologies in the digital age. While the raw data indicate some evidence of redirection of the use of technology for digital literacy immediately after participation in DF, the evaluation finds no evidence to suggest any change in the use of digital literacy practices as a result of participation in DF, from the perspective of parents. Given the prevalence of the use of technology among children, further DF programmes should attend to the way in which literacy is being transformed and how it can be used in a meaningful and relevant way by families.

The analysis of before and after measures suggest that the interagency working that is embedded in DF has not been particularly effective on the development of children's literacy. Yet, the Time 2 survey immediately after participation in DF captured largely positive subjective perceptions of children's emergent literacy – in particular regarding oral language and storytelling, reading, writing and the school experience more generally. The vast majority of parents perceived 'some change' or 'a lot of change' in their child as a result of DF. Just 4.2% of parents/guardians perceived no change at all. While parents/guardians generally indicated that there were positive outcomes for their child in each of these domains, this was particularly the case regarding learning more generally, but also writing and school attendance. Based on these subjective findings, it would appear that parents/guardians became considerably more positive about their child's literacy. Attitudinal change on the part of the parent in all likelihood has an important reinforcement effect on children – that is, a virtuous cycle is created.

6. What is the influence of Doodle Families on parental attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities in the home?

6.1 Introduction

In this section we draw on the findings from the parent/guardian surveys to determine the effectiveness of Doodle Families (DF) on parents' attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities with their children. Specifically, we examine the influence of DF on (i) changes in parents'/guardians' own literacy behaviour and attitudes; (ii) changes in the prevalence and duration of shared reading activities; (iii) changes in shared reading practices in the family; and (iv) changes in shared literacy practices in the home. As with the previous chapter, findings are presented for the two samples – the first sample represents those who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 2, while the second represents those who completed the surveys at Time 1 and Time 3.

6.2 Parents'/guardians' own literacy behaviours and attitudes

Literacy behaviours

As part of the evaluation, we asked respondents about their own literacy habits before and immediately after participation in DF.¹ While these habits are reflective of the choices that parents/guardians make, they are also linked to the availability of literacy sources (Swain et al., 2015). Figure 12 summarises parents'/guardians' reading habits before and immediately after participation in DF. At Time 1, the vast majority read digital text on their computers, e-readers or tablets every day (79.6%) or at least once a week (8.2%). Books were also popular among those who attended DF, as 39.6% indicated that they read books every day and 29.2% at least once a week. The least frequently read materials were newspapers and magazines. Over one-third of parents never read these in hard copy.

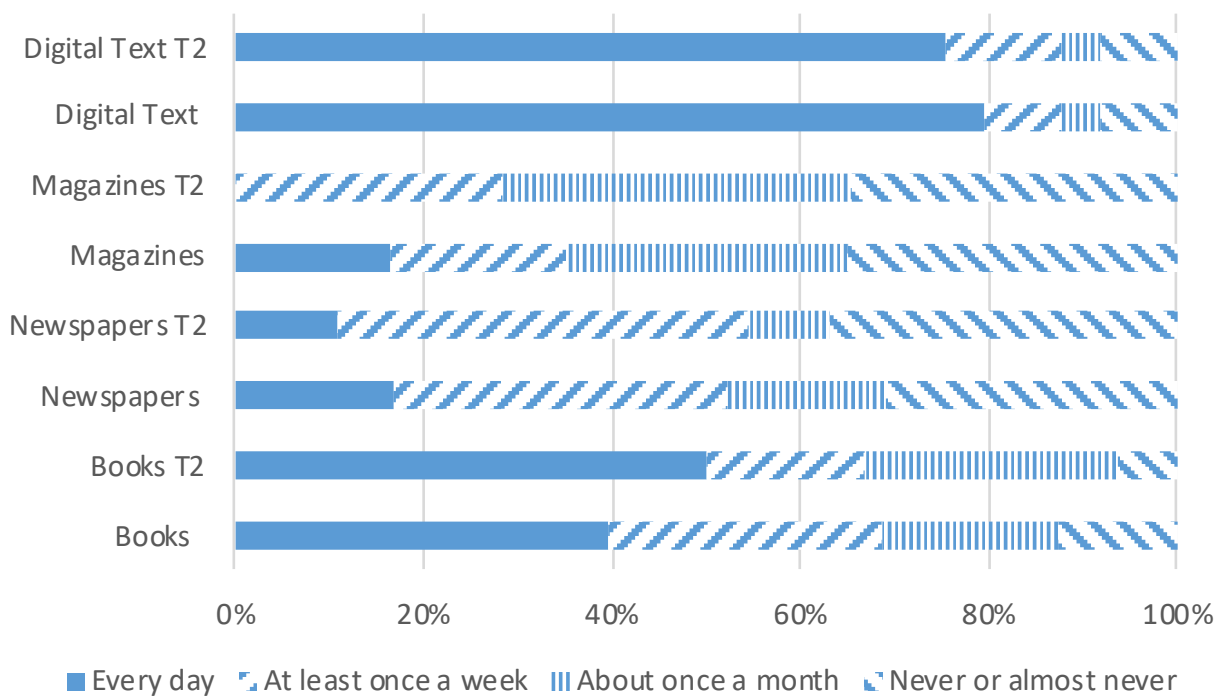
As illustrated by Figure 12, there was little change in parents'/guardians' own reading habits before and immediately after attendance at DF, with the exception of an increase in the share of parents who indicated that they read books ($\chi^2 = 8.385$, $df = 1$, $p = .008$). That is, while the share of parents who did not read books decreased from 12.5% to 6.3% between Time 1 and Time 2, the share of parents reading a book every day increased from 39.6% at Time 1 to 50% at Time 2.

As with previous analyses, scales were derived in relation to parent/guardian reading habits (behaviours). However, these scales did not reach acceptable reliability thresholds. Furthermore, statistical testing (paired sample t-test) revealed no statistically significant difference in scores before and immediately after attending DF. Overall, these findings suggest that DF had little influence on parents' own reading behaviours. However, caution should be taken regarding these findings, given the low reliability of the scales.

¹ These questions were not included in the survey at Time 3. This was because the focus of DF was on the development of family literacy activities rather than parents'/guardians' own literacy behaviours and attitudes per se.

² Reliability estimates included both Alpha (α) and Guttman's lambda-2 (λ_2).

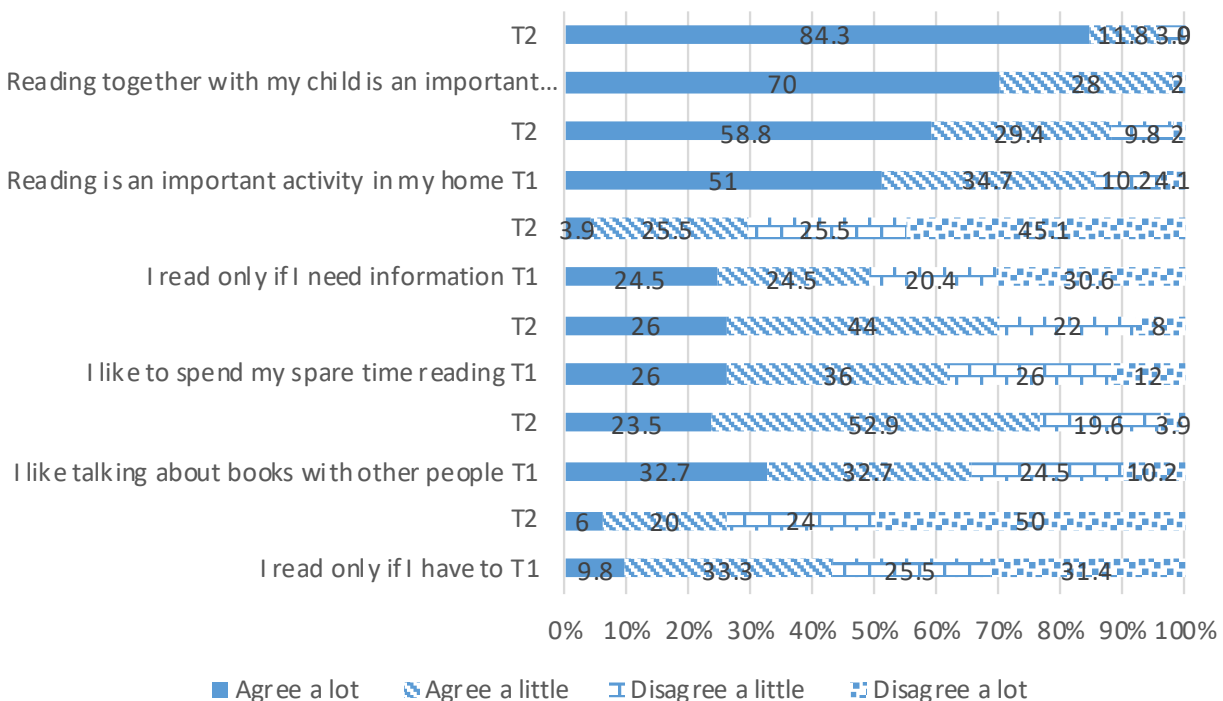
Figure 12: Parents' reading habits at Time 1 and Time 2



Literacy attitudes

We also explored parent/guardian attitudes towards reading before and immediately after participation in DF. As illustrated by Figure 13, before participation in DF the majority of parents (98%) 'agreed a lot/little' with the statement, 'Reading together with my child is an important part of the time we spend together'. A majority (88.2%) indicated that reading is an important activity in the home. Immediately after DF, a greater share of parents/guardians agreed with these statements.

Figure 13: Parents' attitudes towards reading, T1 and T2



In terms of their own reading habits before attending DF, 65.4% of parents/guardians agreed that they like to talk about books with other people and 62% like to spend their spare time reading. Fewer (43.1%) indicated that they read only if they have to and 49% indicated that they read only when they need information.

As with previous analyses, a 'literacy attitude' scale was derived. However, as with the previous scale, this scale did not reach acceptable reliability thresholds.³ A further statistical test (paired sample t-test) revealed no statistically significant difference in scores before and immediately after attending DF.

Both of these findings suggest that DF had little influence on parents' own reading behaviours. However, responses at Time 2 suggest that a majority of parents felt that DF had a positive influence on their outlook. Respondents were asked at Time 2, 'Have you noticed any changes in yourself?', with 77.1% reporting 'some change', 16.7% reporting 'a lot of changes' and just 6.3% indicating no change.

6.3 Shared reading activities

The prevalence and duration of shared reading activities, including at bedtime and at other times, was explored before DF and at both time points after attending DF.

At each time point, parents/guardians were asked, 'At bedtime, how often do you, or other members of the family, read to your child in a typical week?' and 'Other times, how often do you, or other members of the family, read to your child in a typical week?' The descriptive results for the survey at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3 are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Descriptive statistics regarding frequency with which child is read to

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	% Never	% Every night
Bedtime reading					
Before (T1)	3.80	0	7	11.0	23.8
After (T2)	4.96	0	7	1.9	13.5
After (T3)	3.81	0	7	2.3	14.0
Reading at other times					
Before (T1)	4.03	0	7	9.5	22.2
After (T2)	4.45	0	7	2.2	17.4
After (T3)	4.11	0	7	4.7	16.3

Before DF, on average, parents/guardians or other family members read to their child at bedtime 3.8 days per week. Just 11% of parents who attended DF never read to their child at bedtime, while 23.8% read to their child at bedtime every night of the week. At Time 2 and Time 3, the share of parents/guardians who did not read to their child at bedtime reduced to approximately 2%, and this was also the case with the share of parents/guardians who read to their child at bedtime every night of the week.

³ Reliability estimates included both Alpha (α) and Guttman's lambda-2 (λ_2).

Reading to a child can, of course, take place at times other than bedtime. Before DF, on average parents/guardians read to their child four times per week. Few (9.5%) never read to their child, while 22.2% read to their child every day. Again, at Time 2, the share of parents/guardians who did not read to their child at other times reduced to approximately 2% but increased to almost 5% by Time 3.

A scale was created from these two questions resulting in a 'shared reading activities' score. Higher values on the scale indicate more frequent shared reading activities, while lower values on the scale indicate less frequent shared reading activities.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the shared reading score before and at both times after DF. The results are shown in Table 13. The descriptive statistics show that the frequency of shared reading increased immediately after attending DF (M = 7.5, SD = 4.2 at Time 1, M = 8.8, SD = 3.1 at Time 2), and that the difference in scores before and immediately after DF just reached statistical significance ($t(51) = -2.011$, $p = .050$). However, the effect size is deemed to be small (Cohen's $d = .28$). While the descriptive statistics show a marginal increase in the frequency of shared reading six months after DF compared with before (M = 7.80, SD = 4.1 at Time 1, M = 7.88, SD = 3.4 at Time 2), the difference in scores was not statistically significant.

Table 13: Changes in shared reading scores

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Score before DF	7.5 (4.2)	7.80 (4.1)
Score after DF	8.8 (3.1)	7.88 (3.4)
Difference	1.33*	.07
Cohen's d	.280	n/a

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Respondents were also asked about the duration of shared reading sessions, and according to parent/guardian self-reports, the most frequent duration before attending DF was 'between 5 and 10 minutes' (52.9%) followed by 'between 10 and 30 minutes' (35.3%). After DF, more parents were reading for a longer duration – that is, a greater share (60.4%) of parents did so for 10 to 30 minutes, and fewer (37.5%) spent 'between 5 and 10 minutes'. This pattern was also reflected at Time 3 (see Figure 14).

Statistical tests (Wilcoxon signed-rank tests) were carried out to compare the duration of reading before and after, immediately after DF and in the short term (Table 14). The test revealed that participation in DF resulted in a statistically significant change in the duration that parents/guardians spent reading to children immediately after DF ($Z = -2.180$, $p = .029$), as the duration spent reading increased. However, the effect size was small. Furthermore, this finding did not extend to six months after DF ($Z = -.535$, $p = .593$).

Figure 14: Duration of reading sessions

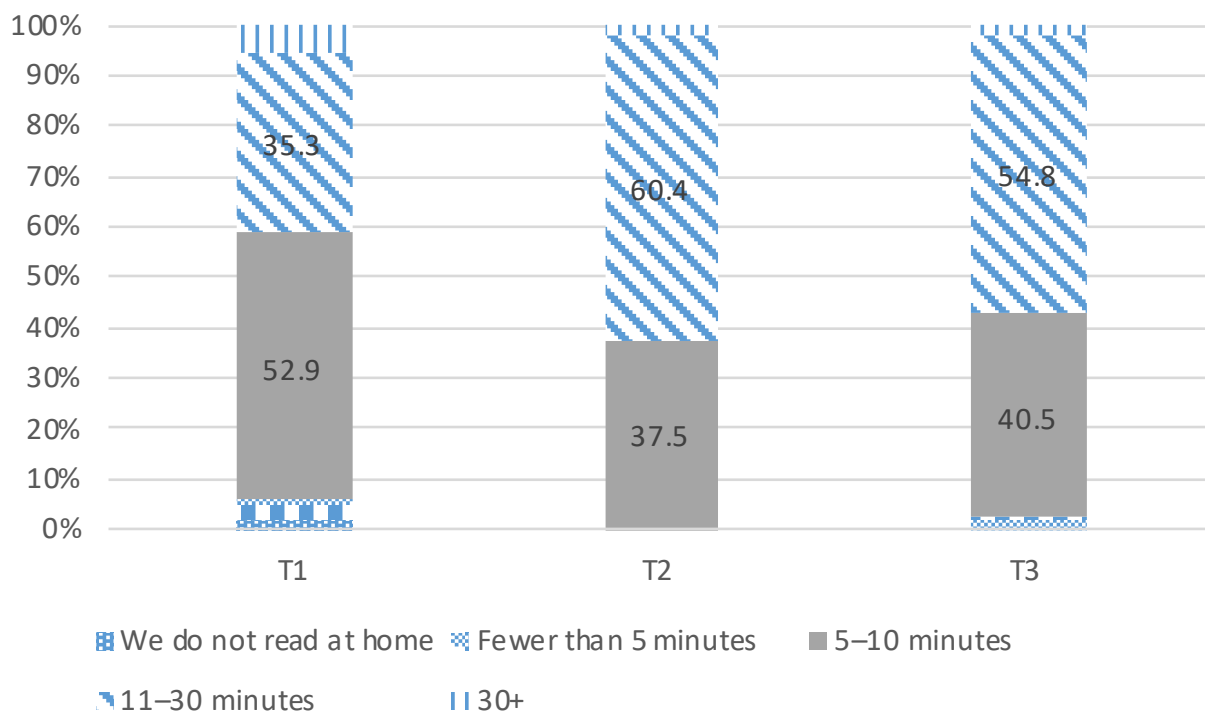


Table 14: Change in duration scores

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Duration score before DF	3.39 (.75)	3.52 (.74)
Duration score after DF	3.65 (.52)	3.56 (.59)
Difference	0.26*	-0.04
Z	-2.180 (p = .029)	-.535, p = .593
Effect size (r = Z/√N)	-.305	n/a

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

6.4 Shared reading practices

Engagement in shared reading practices

We also asked respondents about the shared reading practices that they engage in with the DF child. As illustrated by Figure 15, both before and after DF the vast majority of parents/guardians indicated that they are involved in reading practices beyond the act of reading. While there are some less frequently used shared reading practices employed (such as re-telling the story), the majority of parents/guardians used these practices, at least on some occasions, with some increase after DF.

A 'shared reading practice' scale was derived from questions pertaining to parent/guardian involvement in shared reading practices. Higher scores on this scale indicate lower levels of shared reading practices, while lower scores indicate greater levels of shared reading practices.

Paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare shared reading practice scores before and after attending DF. The results are shown in Table 15. Here, we see that engagement in shared reading practices increased immediately after attending DF and continued to increase six months after participation. The results of the statistical test revealed that the change in score was statistically significant immediately after participating in DF, as well as six months after attending DF. The effect size was 'medium' immediately after DF, and 'large' six months after DF.

Figure 15: Involvement in shared reading practices (% every time or sometimes)

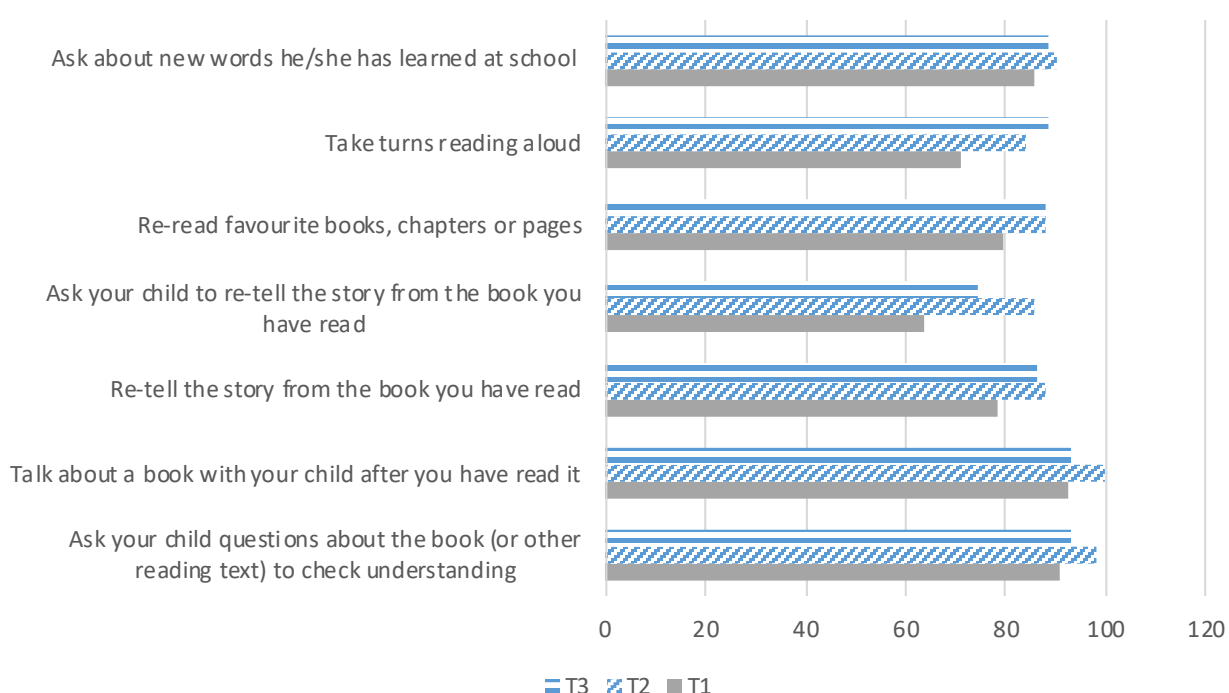


Table 15: Change in shared reading practices score

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Shared reading score before DF	13.1 (3.8)	13.8 (3.8)
Shared reading score after DF	11.5 (3.2)	12.0 (3.6)
Difference	1.63**	1.76***
N	51	43
Effect size (Cohen's d)	.435	.550

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

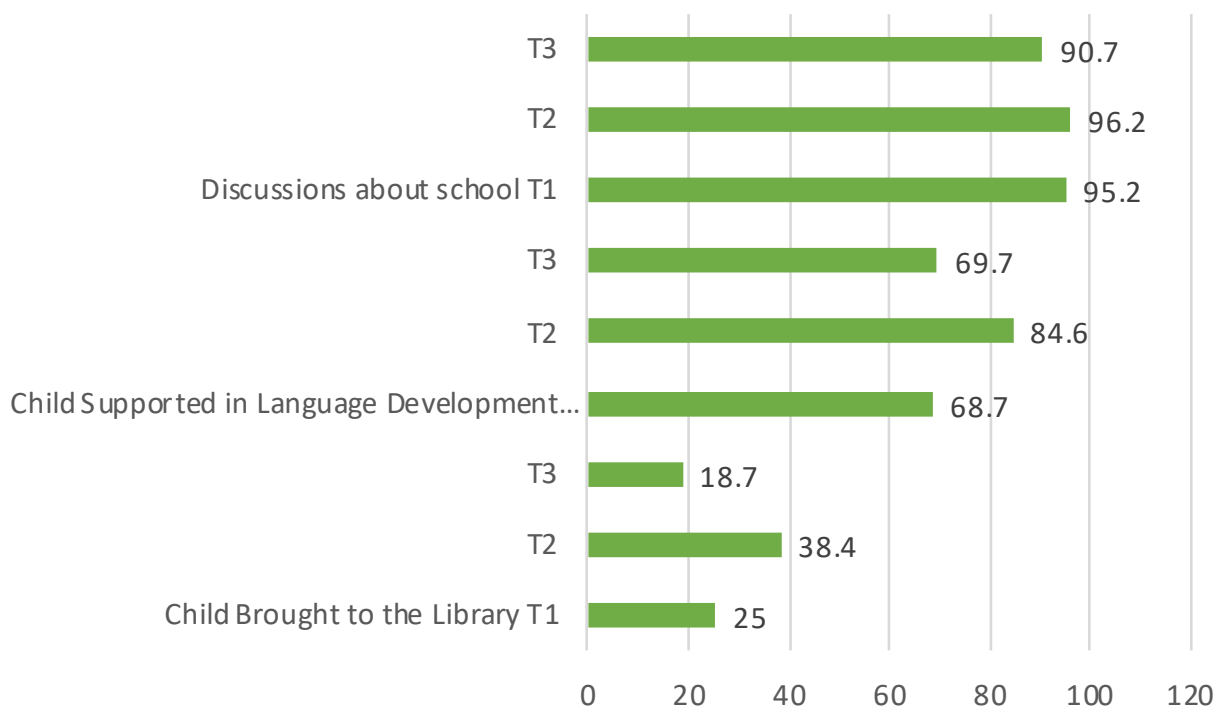
Supportive reading activities

Parents/guardians were also asked before and after DF about their involvement in a range of supportive reading activities including the frequency with which (i) their child is brought to a public library by a family member; (ii) their child is supported in oral language development; and (iii) discussions about school are undertaken in the home between the child and a family member. Figure 16 illustrates the findings from each of the surveys, highlighting the percentage that responded ‘often’ or ‘very often’.

Clearly both before and after DF, parents are providing support for their child, given that 95.2% of parents ‘often’/‘very often’ have discussions with their child about school, and this increased to 96.2% after DF. The programme also appears to have assisted parents/guardians in supporting the language development of their children more frequently. Visiting the library was a less frequent activity in the homes of those who participated in DF at all time points. Before attending DF, over a quarter of parents/guardians (26.6%) ‘never’ brought their child to the library, and for a further one-fifth (20.3%) it was ‘seldom’. Immediately after attending DF, the frequency with which parents/guardians or another family member brought the study child to the library increased, but this decreased at Time 3.

A scale was derived using these measures in order to capture ‘supportive reading activities’ scores before and after attending DF. Higher scores on this scale indicate a higher frequency of using supportive reading activities, while a lower score indicates a lower frequency of using supportive reading activities.

Figure 16: % Often or very often involved in supportive reading activities



As shown in Table 16, the average score was greater immediately after attending DF (M = 11.29, SD = 1.8 at Time 1, M = 12.23, SD = 1.7 at Time 2), and six months after (M = 11.4, SD = 1.8 at Time 3), indicating that these activities took place more often after attending DF than before.

Table 16: Change in supporting reading activities score

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Support reading score before DF	11.29 (1.8)	11.2 (1.8)
Support reading score after DF	12.23 (1.7)	11.4 (1.8)
Difference	-.94***	-.14
N	51	43
Effect size (Cohen's <i>d</i>)	.756	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

While the reliability test for each scale was weak (less than .8), a paired sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in scores before and immediately after DF ($t(51) = -4.933$, $p = .000$), resulting in a large effect size. However, a short-term influence of participating in DF – six months later – was not evident.

6.5 Shared literacy practices in the home

Shared literacy practices also extend beyond reading as an activity. Parents/guardians were asked about the types of literacy practices that they engage in beyond reading, and the frequency of these shared literacy practices. These include working on crossword puzzles or word searches, playing board games together, playing rhyming games, writing together, going on educational visits, making up stories together and singing songs together. The findings for each of the surveys are presented in Table 17.

Table 17: Frequency of shared literacy practices

	Every day/ couple of times a week	Once or twice a month	Never/hardly ever
Work on crossword puzzles, word searches or sudoku T1	19.1	30.2	50.8
T2	30.0	24.0	46.0
T3	16.3	39.5	44.2
Play board games together T1	18.8	46.9	34.4
T2	32.0	40.0	28.0
T3	16.3	39.5	44.2
Play rhyming games or other word games T1	54.7	14.1	31.2
T2	68.0	18.0	14.0
T3	59.7	20.9	18.6
Write with your child T1	41.3	28.6	30.2
T2	58.0	30.0	12.0
T3	52.4	26.2	21.5
Go on educational visits outside of home T1	12.5	59.4	28.1
T2	12.0	72.0	16.0
T3	4.6	69.8	25.6
Make up stories together T1	52.4	25.4	22.3
T2	68.0	16.0	16.0
T3	60.5	18.6	20.9
Sing songs together T1	89.1	4.7	6.2
T2	92.0	6.0	2.0
T3	83.7	7.0	9.3

The most popular habitual activities at each of the time points include singing songs together and playing rhyming or other word games including making up stories. Each of these activities was undertaken on a regular weekly basis by the majority of families before they attended DF. The frequency of these activities increased in the survey at Time 2, and in the second survey, a majority of families were also involved in writing together. Levels somewhat declined at Time 3.

Other popular shared literacy practices include parents and children talking about what the child likes and dislikes about school and about their experiences in school as well as listening to the child read, helping the child with phonics and spellings, and making up stories together. The responses to each of these items for each of the surveys are presented in Table 18.

Table 18: Frequency of shared literacy practices (2)

	Every day/ once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Hardly ever/ never
Listen to audiobooks T1	11.3	6.5	82.3
T2	13.7	9.8	76.5
T3	7.2	14.3	78.6
Borrow books from the library T1	15.9	28.6	55.5
T2	19.6	43.1	37.3
T3	14.3	35.7	50.0
Visit the library T1	12.5	39.1	48.5
T2	18.0	46.0	36.0
T3	14.0	37.2	48.9
Make up stories without a book together T1	64.0	20.3	15.7
T2	80.4	9.8	9.8
T3	69.8	16.3	14.0
Help my child with spellings T1	92.2	1.6	6.3
T2	96.1	2.0	2.0
T3	93.1	2.3	4.7
Help my child with phonics T1	93.8	3.1	3.2
T2	94.1	2.0	3.9
T3	86.0	7.0	7.0
Listen to my child read T1	96.8	1.6	1.6
T2	98.0	2.0	0.0
T3	95.1	4.9	0.0
Ask about how my child feels when in school T1	98.4	1.6	0.0
T2	100	0.0	0.0
T3	100	0.0	0.0
Talk about what my child likes and dislikes about school T1	96.8	3.2	0.0
T2	94.2	5.9	0.0
T3	97.7	2.3	0.0

What we find is that many of these activities were popular shared activities among children and their parents before attending DF. This was particularly the case for making up stories, helping with spelling,

helping with phonics, listening to the child read, asking how the child feels at school, and talking about the child's likes and dislikes. The popularity of these activities generally increased immediately after attending DF but declined again somewhat at Time 3. Less popular activities in each of the surveys were listening to audiobooks, visiting a library and borrowing books from a library.

A scale was derived using each of these measures shown in Table 17 and Table 18 in order to capture a 'shared literacy practice' score before and after attending DF. A higher score on this scale indicates a lower frequency of shared literacy practices while a lower score indicates a higher frequency of shared literacy practices.

As shown in Table 19, a paired sample t-test indicates that the average score was greater before attending DF than after ($M = 38.5$, $SD = 8.1$ at Time 1, $M = 34.4$, $SD = 7.4$ at Time 2), indicating that these activities took place more often immediately after attending DF than before, and more often six months after attending DF than before ($M = 39.5$, $SD = 7.2$ at Time 1, $M = 37.9$, $SD = 7.8$ at Time 3). To put it simply, the descriptive statistics indicate that parents/guardians improved the frequency of shared literacy activities both immediately after participating in DF and in the six months that followed.

The paired sample t-test results show that the difference in scores before and immediately after DF is statistically significant, with a medium effect size. However, the difference in scores before and six months after participating in DF was not statistically significant.

Table 19: Change in shared literacy practice scores

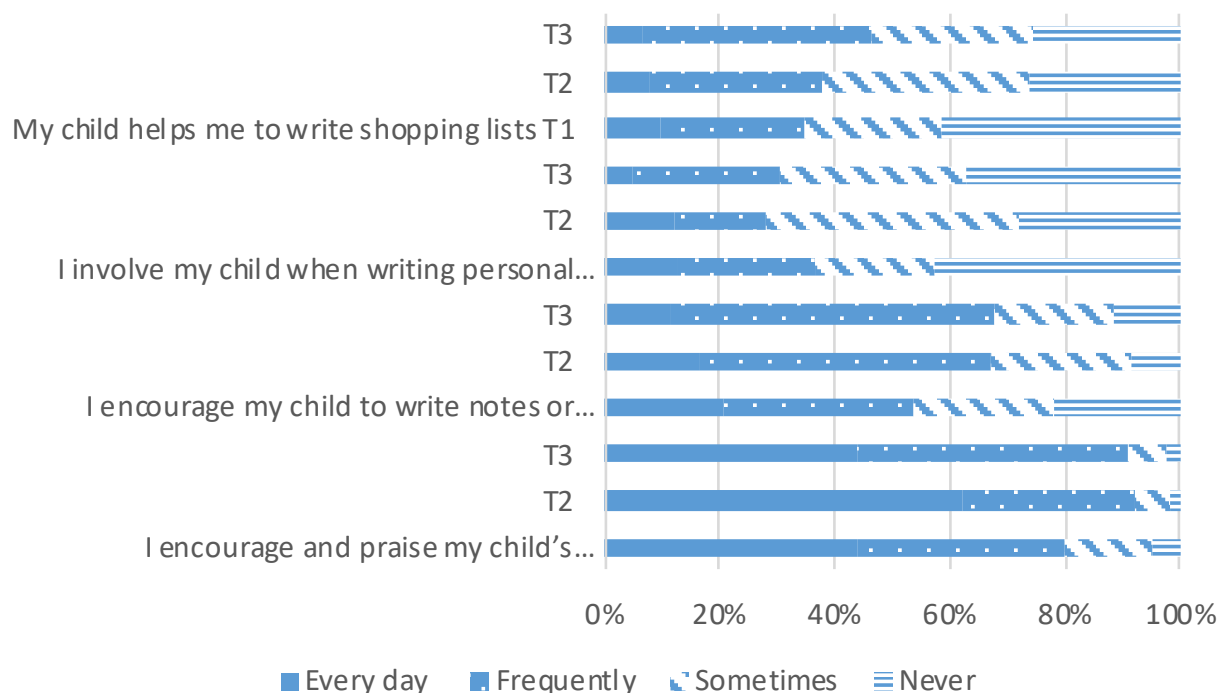
	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Shared literacy score before DF	38.5 (8.1)	39.5 (7.2)
Shared literacy score after DF	34.4 (7.4)	37.9 (7.8)
Difference	4.11	1.59
N	51**	43
Effect size (Cohen's <i>d</i>)	.432	n/a

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

6.6 Shared writing practices

Writing as a literacy practice was also explored in the surveys. We asked parents/guardians at each of the time points about the frequency with which they encourage their child to write or engage in writing activities. The results for each of the surveys are shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Frequency of shared writing practices



As Figure 17 illustrates, the majority of parents/guardians (80.4%) before attending DF frequently encouraged and praised their child's attempt at play and writing for fun, and a majority encouraged their child to write notes.

As with previous analyses, a 'shared writing practices' scale was derived from these items. Using this scale, higher scores indicate a lower frequency of shared writing practices, while lower scores indicate a higher frequency of shared writing practices.

A paired t-test (see Table 20) shows that the average shared writing score is lower immediately after attending DF than before ($M = 10.3$, $SD = 3.3$ at Time 1, $M = 9.4$, $SD = 2.5$ at Time 2), but also six months after DF. These descriptive findings indicate that parents/guardians improved the frequency of shared writing literacy activities after attending DF. Statistical tests showed that the difference in before and immediately after scores was statistically significant ($t(49) = 2.129$, $p = .038$), though this reflects a small effect size. The difference in scores before and six months after DF was not statistically significant.

Table 20: Change in shared writing practice scores

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Shared writing score before DF	10.3 (3.4)	10.4 (2.9)
Shared writing score after DF	9.4 (2.5)	9.8 (2.5)
Difference	0.97*	0.59
N	49	43
Effect size (Cohen's <i>d</i>)	.290	n/a

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

6.7 Summary

In this section we sought to analyse the responses from the surveys to determine the effectiveness of DF on parents' attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities with their children. Specifically, we examined changes in (i) parents' own literacy behaviour and attitudes; (ii) shared reading activities; (iii) shared reading practices; and (iv) shared literacy practices in the home before and after DF. Our statistical analysis show that DF had no influence on parents' own literacy behaviours and attitudes. However, DF did have a positive influence on shared reading activities in the home, engagement in supportive reading activities, and engagement in shared literacy and writing practices immediately after completing the family literacy initiative. However, there was no evidence of an ongoing influence of DF on these aspects of the home literacy environment after six months. There was, however, one exception. The statistical analysis shows a statistically significant positive influence on shared reading practices both immediately after DF and after six months. These important literacy activities include asking about new words, taking turns reading, re-reading favourite books, re-telling the story, asking questions, and talking about the book. Furthermore, the effect size was 'medium' immediately after DF and 'large' six months later.

With regard to parents'/guardians' own literacy behaviour and attitudes, the data show that parents/guardians rely largely on digital text for their own reading. The least frequently read materials were newspapers and magazines. Prior to participating in DF, over one-third never read these in hard copy. In terms of attitudes, the majority of parents/guardians before attending DF already agreed that reading together is an important activity and almost two-thirds enjoyed talking about books with other people and liked to spend their time reading. However, almost a half were in the habit of reading only when they needed information. Analysis of before and after measures indicate that DF did not have a statistically significant influence on parent/guardian reading behaviours or attitudes.

The second set of analysis sought to explore changes in the prevalence and duration of shared reading activities as a result of participation in DF. Here, (i) changes in the frequency of bedtime reading and reading at other times were explored as well as (ii) changes in the duration of reading at these times. For both, we report a small statistically significant positive effect of DF on shared reading activities immediately after participating in DF, but no short-term influence (six months after).

The third set of analysis focused on change in the frequency of shared reading practices as a result of participation in DF. Here we sought to examine the influence of DF on (i) parent/guardian engagement in shared literacy practices and (ii) parent/guardian engagement in supportive reading activities.

It is important to note that before DF the vast majority of parents/guardians indicated that they are involved in reading practices beyond the act of reading. These activities include asking about new words, taking turns reading, re-reading favourite books, re-telling the story, asking questions and talking about the book. While some practices are less frequently employed than others (such as re-telling the story), the majority of parents/guardians used these practices, at least on some occasions, with some increase after DF. We report a medium statistically significant positive effect of DF on shared reading activities immediately after participating in DF and a large statistically significant positive effect of DF in the short term (six months after).

With regard to engagement with supportive reading activities (visiting a public library, oral language development, discussions about school), we report a large effect of DF on parent/guardian engagement in supporting reading activities immediately after attending DF, but not in the short term.

The evaluation also sought to tap into a range of shared literacy practices in the home. These include working on crossword puzzles or word searches, playing board games together, playing rhyming games, writing together, going on educational visits, making up stories together and singing songs together. The descriptive statistics indicate that parents/guardians improved the frequency of shared literacy activities both immediately after participating in DF and in the six months that followed. We report a medium statistically significant positive effect of DF on parent/guardian engagement in shared literacy activities immediately after attending DF, but no such effect in the short term.

Finally, we also explored involvement in shared writing practices. Parents/guardians were asked at each of the time points about the frequency with which they encourage their child to write or engage in writing activities. While the majority of parents/guardians (80.4%) before attending DF regularly encouraged and frequently praised their child's attempt at play and writing for fun, shared writing activities were somewhat less prevalent. We report a small statistically significant positive effect of DF on involvement in shared writing practices immediately after attending DF, but no such effect in the short term.

7. What is the influence of Doodle Families on parental knowledge and confidence of how to best support their children's learning at home?

7.1 Introduction

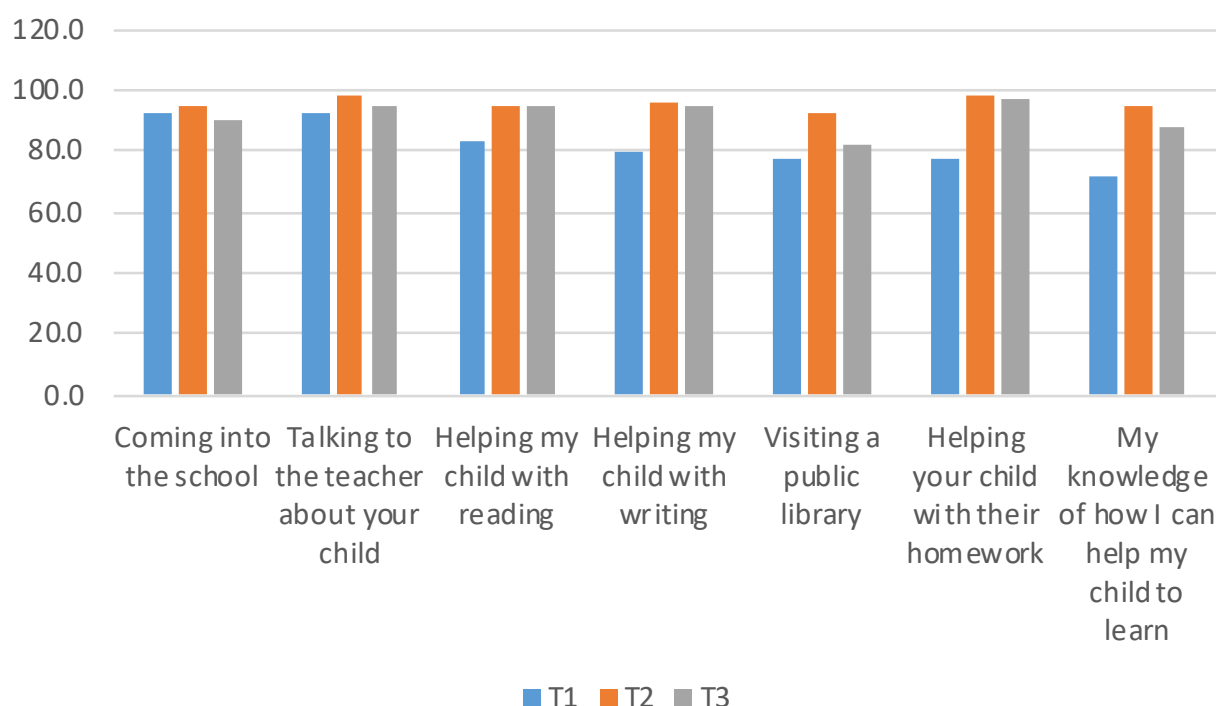
In this section we explore the effectiveness of Doodle Families (DF) in supporting parents/guardians in the study child's learning at home. This section begins by exploring (i) parent/guardian confidence in approaching the school and confidence in their own knowledge regarding pedagogy more generally. We then move on to examine (ii) beliefs about school and understanding of how school literacies are taught; (iii) the perceived balance of responsibility for parents/guardians and school when it comes to school matters; and (iv) changes to the number of books in the home.

7.2 Parent/guardian confidence in school literacies

To provide some context to the issue of 'confidence', the most frequently mentioned reasons for parents/guardians opting to join DF largely relate to gaining support and more knowledge of school matters and pedagogy (see Appendix). Before attending DF, the majority of parents/guardians (92.2%) reported that their child receives homework 'every day or 'almost every day'. Before attending the programme, all parents/guardians believed that reading and writing homework is important in their child's learning, and 82.4% indicated that is 'very important'.

As shown in Figure 18, the vast majority (90% or over) of parents/guardians felt 'confident' or 'very confident' before attending DF about coming into the school, talking to teachers about their child and helping their child with homework. However, parents/guardians were less confident when it came to visiting a library (78.4%) and in their knowledge of how to best support their child to learn (76.5%).

As illustrated by Figure 18, by the end of DF confidence levels had increased across a majority of the items. This was particularly the case regarding 'my knowledge of how I can help my child to learn' as well as helping the child with reading, writing and homework.

Figure 18: Share of parents that are 'confident' or 'very confident' with school literacies

In order to estimate the influence of DF, we ran a paired sample t-test to compare parents'/guardians' confidence levels before and after attendance at DF. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater confidence, while lower scores on the scale indicate lower levels of confidence. As shown in Table 21, the combined scores were higher immediately after the course, as well as six months later. Results of the statistical test indicate that DF has a large and statistically significant positive influence on parent/guardian confidence levels around school literacies immediately after DF but not in the six months that follow.

Table 21: Change in confidence scores

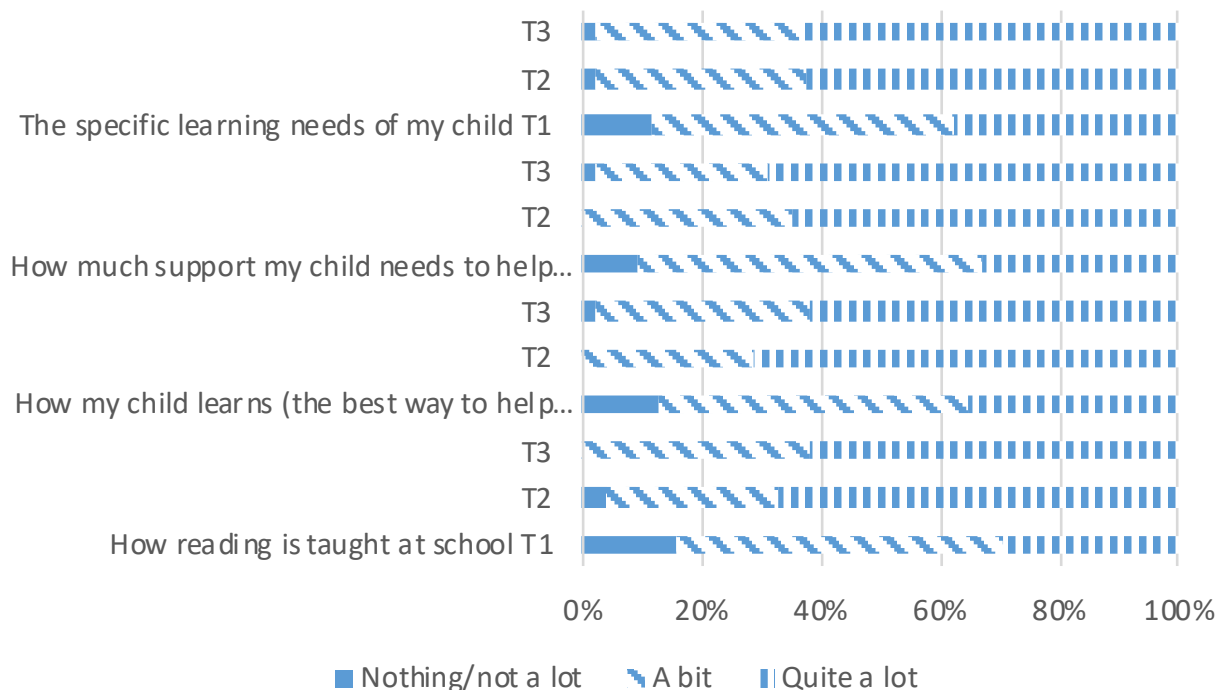
	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Confidence score before DF	31.1 (3.6)	30.6 (4.2)
Confidence score after DF	33.4 (2.7)	31.2 (5.7)
Difference	-2.25***	-.56
N	51	43
Effect size	.658	n/a

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

7.3 Parent/guardian knowledge of learning processes and learning needs

Parents/guardians were asked about their understanding of the learning processes used by the school specifically with regard to how reading is taught, and also about their knowledge of the learning needs of their children. The results for each of the surveys are illustrated by Figure 19.

Figure 19: Parent knowledge of learning processes and learning needs



Before attending DF a majority of parents/guardians indicated that that knew ‘a bit’ about how reading is taught (54.9%), while almost one-third indicated that they knew ‘quite a lot’. These patterns were also generally reflected in knowledge of the learning needs of their children and how best to support their child.

As illustrated by Figure 19, by the end of DF parents/guardians perceived that their knowledge levels had increased across each of the items. That is, much fewer felt that they knew ‘nothing’ or ‘not a lot’ about how reading is taught at school (down from 13.7% to 3.9%), but also about the learning needs of their children and how best to support their child.

As with previous analyses, a scale was derived from these items to create a ‘knowledge score’. Higher scores indicate higher levels of knowledge, while lower scores indicate lower levels. A paired sample t-test was conducted to estimate the influence of DF on parental knowledge before and after attendance at DF. As shown in Table 22, the combined scores were higher after the course than before, suggesting a positive influence of DF on improving parental knowledge. Results of the statistical test indicate that DF has a large and statistically significant positive influence on parent/guardian knowledge of learning processes and learning needs both immediately after DF and in the short term.

Table 22: Change in knowledge scores

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Knowledge score before DF	8.8 (2.1)	9.0 (2.0)
Knowledge score after DF	10.5 (1.8)	10.5 (1.6)
Difference	1.66***	1.5***
N	51	43
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	.703	.764

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

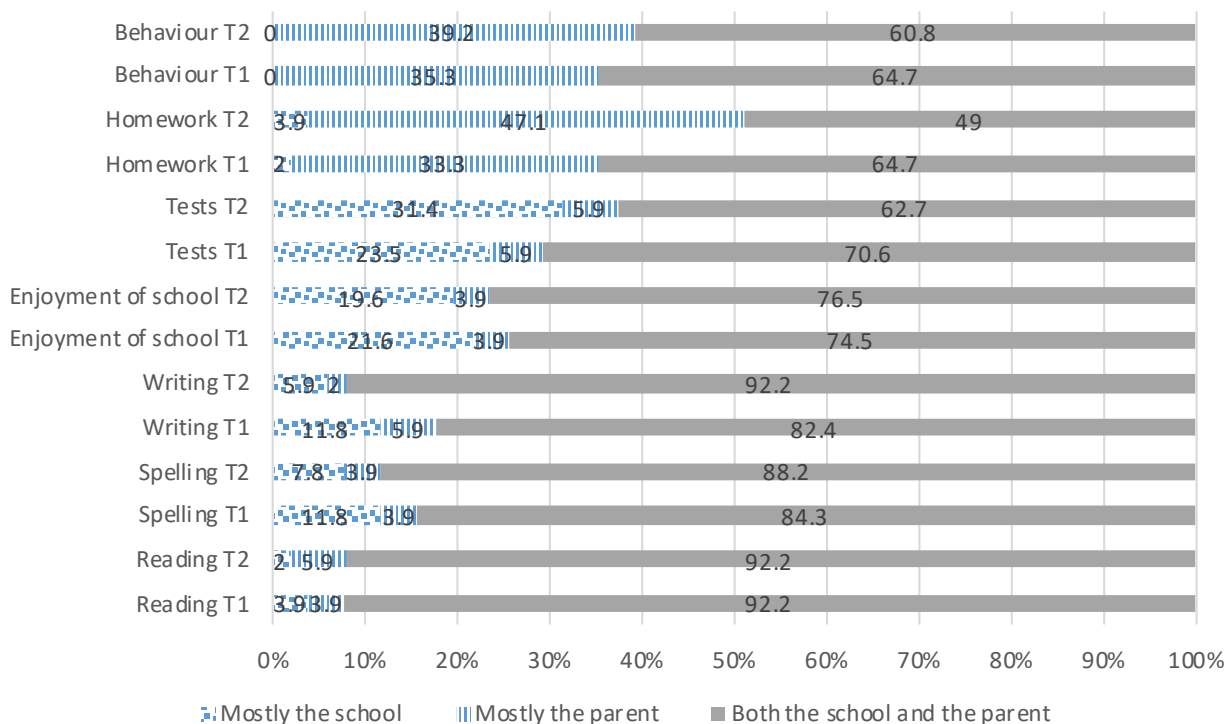
7.4 The balance of responsibility between schools and parents

The surveys also contained questions on the role of parents/guardians and the school in the development of reading, writing, spelling, homework, tests, behaviour and enjoyment of school before and immediately after DF (see Figure 20).

Most parents/guardians report that each of these aspects of literacy development and broader experience of school is shared between school and the parents. However, there was some variation in responses. While the vast majority of parents/guardians felt that the traditional areas of literacy development – reading, writing, and spelling – are a shared responsibility between the school and parents/guardians, over one-third felt that behaviour and homework are largely the responsibility of parents/guardians. Over one-fifth reported that responsibility for tests and enjoyment of school is largely the responsibility for schools – or at least more the responsibility of the school than of parents/guardians.

While not shown here, there was no statistically significant difference in scores before and immediately after attending DF. Figure 20 illustrates that attendance at DF did have the influence of embedding an outlook of shared responsibility, particularly regarding spelling, writing and enjoyment of school. After DF, a greater share of parents/guardians seemed to be under the impression that behaviour and homework are more the responsibility of the parent/guardian than of the school or a shared responsibility; while tests were seen increasingly as the responsibility of the school.

Figure 20: Parent perceptions of the balance of responsibilities



7.5 Changes in the number of books in the home

The evaluation also sought to examine if there are changes in the number of books in the home as a result of participation in DF. At each of the time points, parents/guardians were asked about the number of books in the home for adults and the number of books in the home for children.

The results of each of the three surveys are illustrated in Figure 21 and Figure 22. We see clearly that the share of households with no books declined in each survey. The share of respondents with no books in the home for adults declined from 9.7% at Time 1 to 4.8% at Time 3. Likewise, the share of respondents with no books in the home for children declined from 23.8% at Time 1 to 9.3% at Time 3. Between the two time points, we also see a steady increase in the number of children’s books in the home.

Figure 21: Number of books in the home for adults

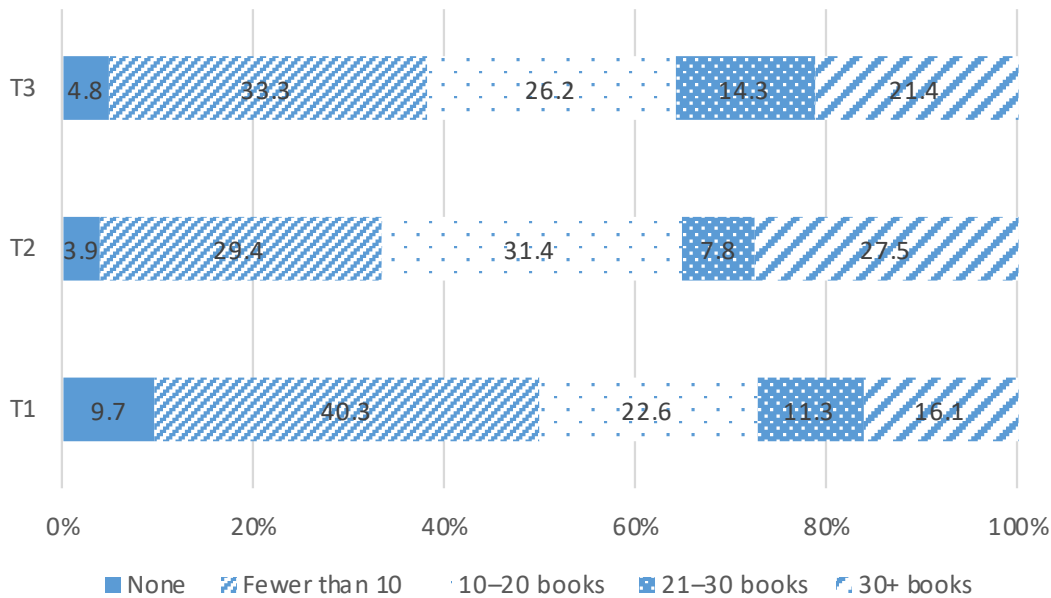
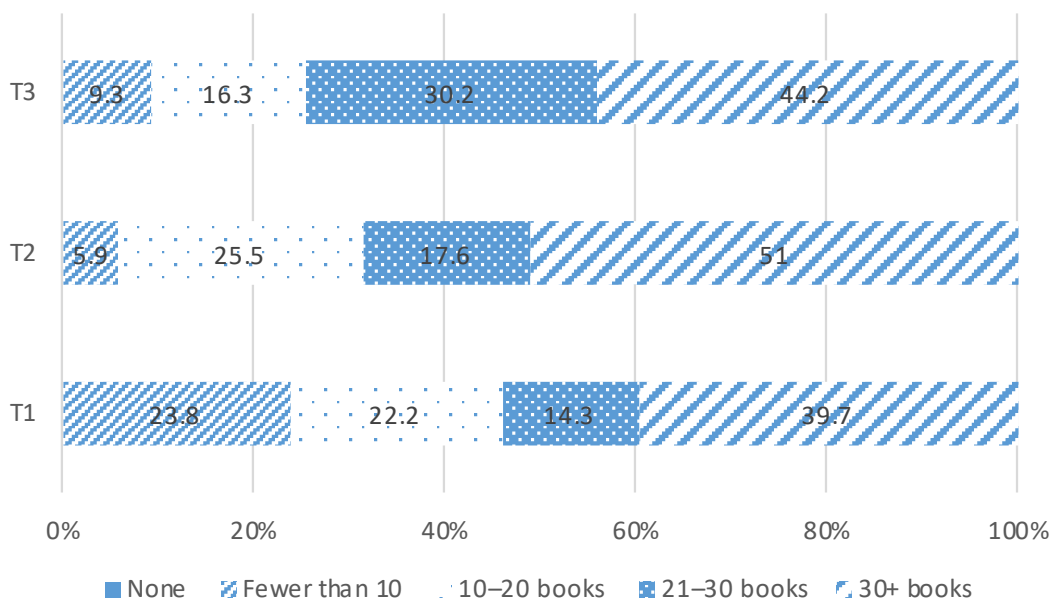


Figure 22: Number of books in the home for children



Statistical tests (Wilcoxon signed-rank tests) were undertaken to compare changes in the average number of books before and after attending DF, both immediately after DF and in the short term. The results are shown in Table 23 and Table 24. The tests revealed that participation in DF resulted in a medium statistically significant positive change in the number of books for adults ($Z = -3.621$, $p = .000$) and a small statistically significant positive change in the number of books for children ($Z = -2.456$, $p = .014$) in the home immediately after DF. While a small statistically significant positive influence of DF on the number of books for adults in the home was also evident six months later ($Z = -1.995$, $p = .046$), this was not the case for children's books ($Z = -1.483$, $p = .138$).

Table 23: Change in the number of books for adults in the home

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Score before DF	2.7 (1.2)	2.8 (1.2)
Score after DF	3.2 (1.2)	3.1 (1.2)
Difference	.48***	0.24*
N	50	41
Effect size (Rosenthal)	.512	.311

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 24: Change in the number of books for children in the home

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Score before DF	3.7 (1.2)	3.9 (1.2)
Score after DF	4.1 (1.0)	4.1 (1.0)
Difference	.38**	0.19
N	50	42
Effect size (Rosenthal)	.347	.228

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

7.6 Summary

In this section we sought to explore the effectiveness of DF in supporting parents'/guardians' knowledge and confidence of how to best support their child's learning at home. In doing so, we examined (i) parent/guardian confidence in approaching the school and confidence in their own knowledge regarding pedagogy more generally; (ii) beliefs about school and understanding of how school literacies are taught; (iii) the perceived balance of responsibility for parents/guardians and school when it comes to school matters; and (iv) changes to the number of books in the home.

While the vast majority (90% or over) of parents felt confident or very confident before attending DF about coming into the school, talking to teachers about their child and helping their child with homework, parents were less confident when it came to visiting a library (78.4%) and were less confident in their knowledge of how to best support their child to learn (76.5%). After attending DF, parental confidence levels had increased, and this was particularly the case with regard to 'visiting a library' and 'my knowledge of how I can help my child to learn'. The results of statistical testing show that DF has a large and statistically positive influence on parent/guardian confidence levels around the literacies that are valued in school settings – school literacies – immediately after DF but not in the short term.

There was strong evidence to suggest that DF has an influence on parent/guardian understanding of learning processes used by the school. The evaluation finds that before attending DF parent/guardian understanding of learning processes used by the school specifically with regard to how reading is taught, and knowledge of the learning needs of their children, was relatively low. Results of the statistical tests indicate that DF has a large and statistically significant positive influence on parent/guardian knowledge of learning processes and learning needs both immediately after DF and in the short term.

The surveys also sought to capture before and after measures of parents' perceptions of the balance of responsibilities between parents and the school in the development of reading, writing, spelling, homework, tests, behaviour and children's enjoyment of school. While there was no statistically significant difference in scores before and immediately after attending DF, it would seem that attendance at DF did have the influence of embedding an outlook of shared responsibility, particularly with regard to spelling, writing and enjoyment of school. After DF a greater share of parents seemed to be under the impression that behaviour and homework are more the responsibility of the parent than of the school or a shared responsibility, while tests were seen increasingly as the responsibility of the school.

Finally, while the number of books in the home for both adults and children increased at each of the three time points, the statistical analysis indicates a positive change in the number of books in the home for both adults and children immediately after DF. However, the short-term influence of DF on the number of books in the home was evident in relation to books for adults only.

8. What is the influence of Doodle Families on the relationship between parents and teachers, and overall impressions of Doodle Families?

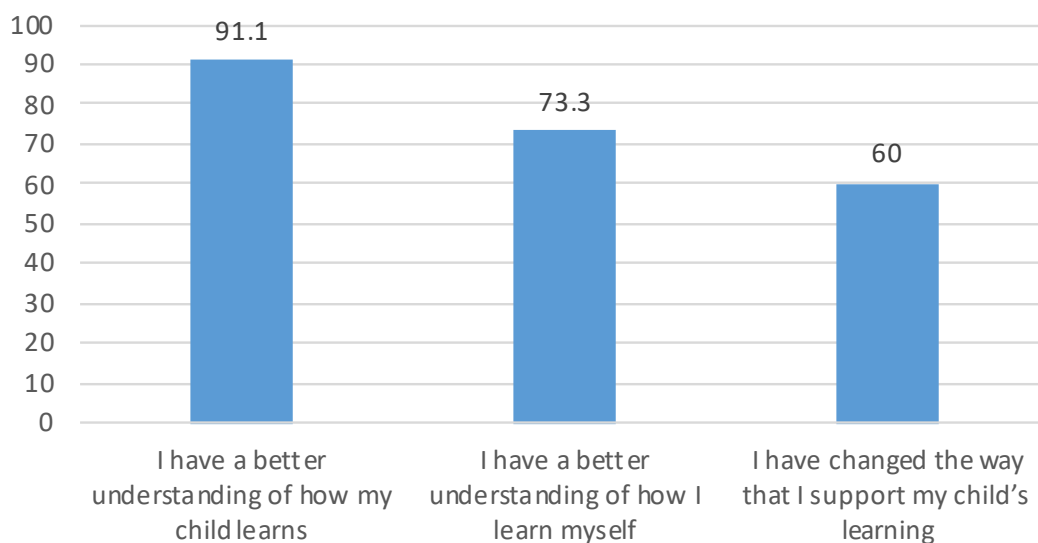
8.1 Introduction

In this final section we explore (i) the influence of Doodle Families (DF) on building literacy relationships; (ii) the influence of DF on feeling supported; (iii) the influence of DF on confidence in seeking support including the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers; and (iii) overall impressions of DF from parents/guardians.

8.2 Influence of Doodle Families on building literacy relationships

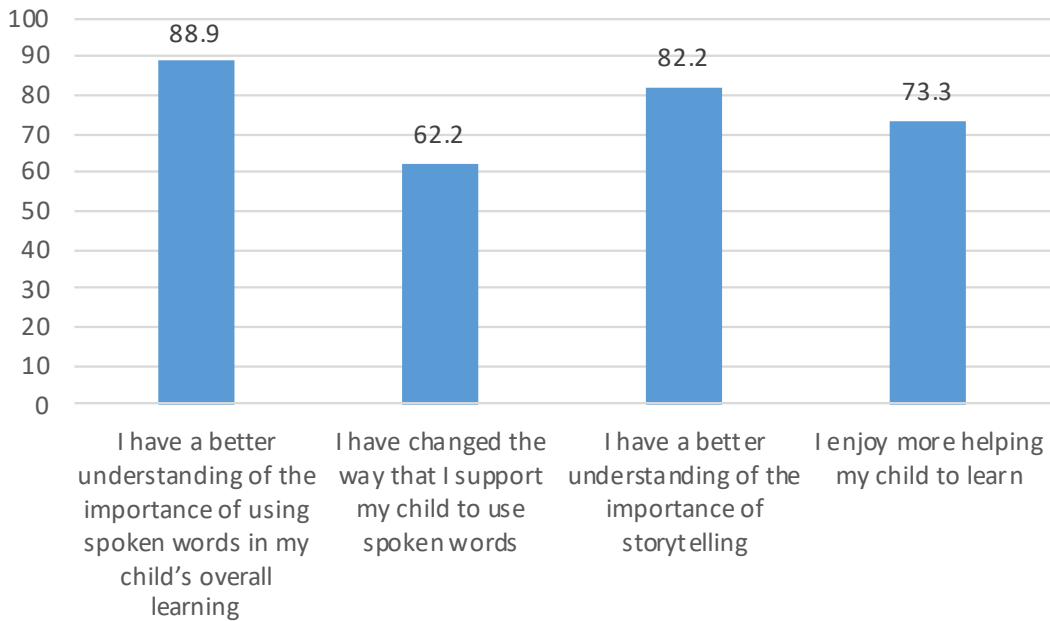
There was evidence to suggest that DF had some influence on bringing parents and school together in a shared literacy objective for their child. A range of questions asked at Time 2 captured parent/guardian subjective insights into how parents/guardians perceive learning and how their child learns. Immediately after the programme, a majority of parents/guardians (91.1%) report that they have a better understanding of how their child learns, but also of how they learn as individuals themselves (73.3%). Importantly, 60% reported that they have changed the way in which they support their child's learning (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Changes in perceptions of learning 1



Furthermore, a majority of parents/guardians report that they have a better understanding of the importance of using spoken words (88.9%) and storytelling (82.2%) for literacy (Figure 24), with 62% reporting that they have changed their behaviour in this regard and almost three-quarters reporting that they enjoy helping their child when it comes to learning.

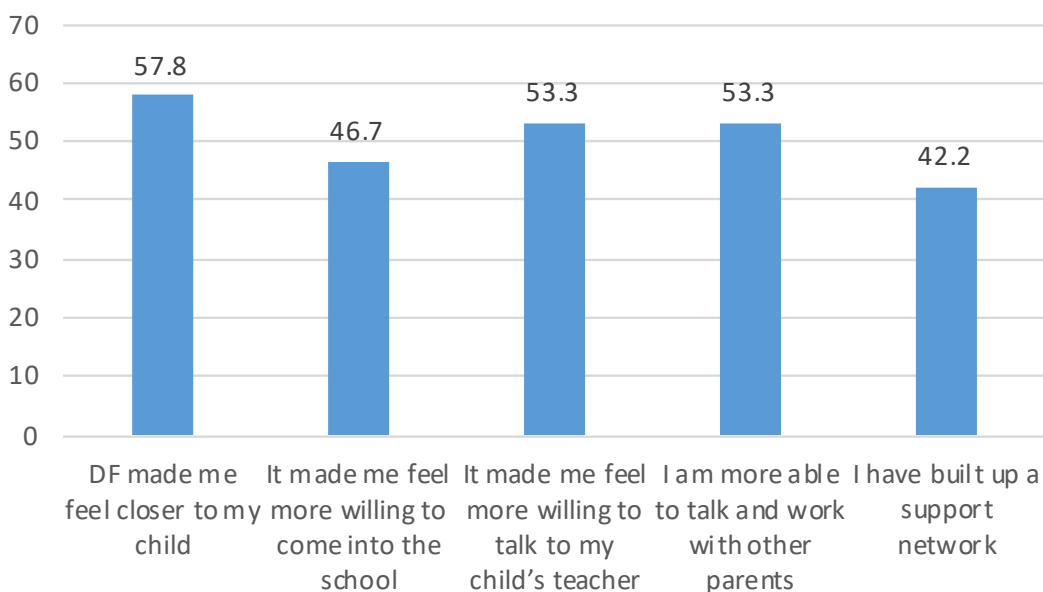
Figure 24: Changes in perceptions of learning 2



8.3 Influence of Doodle Families on feeling supported

After DF, just over half of respondents that participated at Time 1 and Time 2 agreed that the programme 'made me feel closer to my child' (57.8%) and 'made me feel more willing to talk to my child's teacher' and 'more able to talk and work with other parents' (53.3%). Based on these subjective insights, DF was less successful in making parents/guardians more willing to come into the school (see Figure 25) or in helping parents/guardians to build up a support network in order to support the family literacy environment.

Figure 25: Perceptions of DF

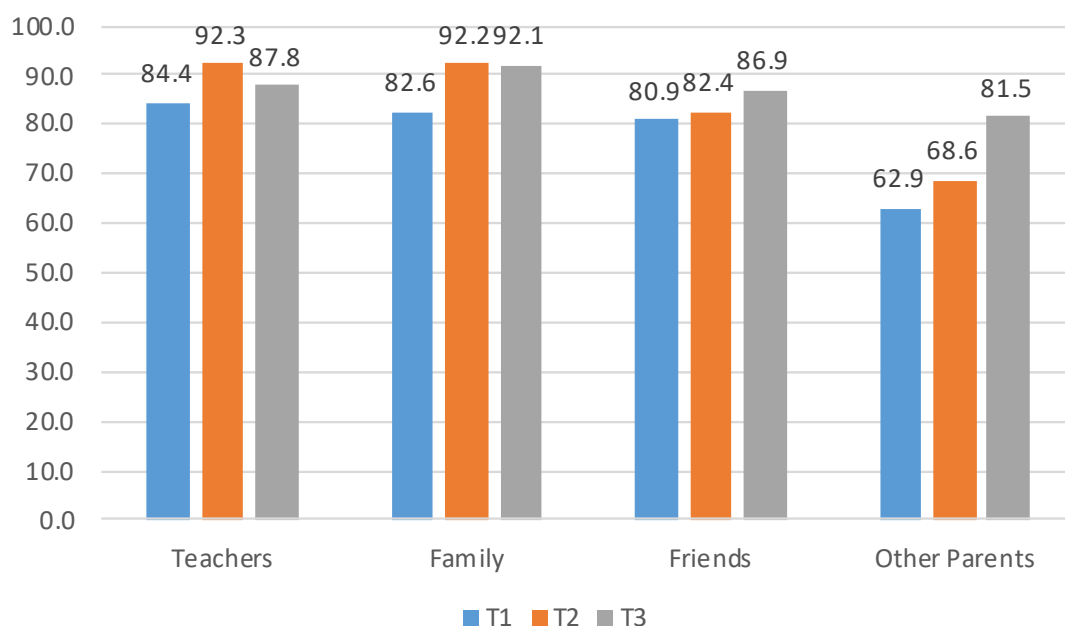


8.4 Confidence in seeking support

The findings above can be further explored using the survey data (from each of the three time points) that sought to capture how confident parents were in asking other people – teachers, other parents, friends and family – about things they might not understand in their child’s homework or schooling more generally, before and after attending DF. This question sought to capture both change in the perception of parents, but also ‘parent–school alignment’, that is, alignment between school and parental cultural expectations (See and Gorard, 2015).

Figure 26 illustrates the percentage of parents/guardian before and after who indicated that they are either ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ in seeking support from each of these sources. Before DF, the vast majority (at least 80%) report that they are ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ in asking teachers, friends or family for support. However, fewer (just 60%) report that they would ask other parents about things they might not understand in their child’s homework or schooling more generally. As illustrated by Figure 26, by the final survey respondents for the most part report higher levels of confidence in seeking support, but particularly with regard to asking other parents about things they might not understand in their child’s homework or schooling. That is, 81.5% of parents after attending DF felt that they were ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ in asking other parents for help, up from 62.9% before the programme.

Figure 26: Confidence levels in seeking support



As with previous analyses, a parent/guardian ‘confidence in seeking support’ scale was derived from these items. Higher values on the scale indicate greater levels of confidence, while lower values on the scale indicate lower levels of confidence.

A paired sample t-test was used to estimate the influence of DF on parent/guardian confidence scores before and after attendance at DF. As shown in Table 25, mean confidence scores were higher immediately after DF than before, but were lower six months after DF compared with before DF. Statistical tests (paired sample t-tests) show a small but statistically significant positive influence of DF on parent/guardian confidence levels immediately after participating, but no such influence in the short term. These findings

suggest some areas for improvement, particularly concerning effective ways to enhance social capital among parents and ways to sustain the gains made immediately after attending DF.

Table 25: Change in confidence scores

	Immediately after DF (T1 and T2)	Short term (T1 and T3)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Score before DF	16.7 (3.6)	16.5 (3.6)
Score after DF	17.7 (3.0)	16.2 (5.3)
Difference	-1.07*	0.26
N	51	43
Effect size (Cohen's d)	.257	n/a

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

8.5 Overall impressions of Doodle Families

As indicated in Chapter 4, just over a quarter (26%) of parents/guardians had previously attended some form of family literacy programme, and just 8% had previously participated in a Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) programme in the community. Almost one-third (at T3) had children who previously attended either Doodle Den or DF. Thus, for the majority of parents/guardians, this was their first encounter with family literacy, but also with CDI.

Respondents were asked about their overall impressions of DF – ‘What has been your experience of participating in DF?’ – and parents/guardians could respond with ‘Good’, ‘Fair’ or ‘Poor’. The vast majority (96%) report that their experience of DF was good, and 4% report that their experience was ‘fair’.

Furthermore, the vast majority (98% at T2 and 100% at T3) felt that they had learned new ways (tips, games, activities) to support their child in the development of their literacy. Of these, over half (58%) agreed that other family members also adopted these new ways; however, 42% did not.

When asked about the types of activities that families took on during DF, parents/guardians spoke about changing literacy practices in terms of reading, writing and engaging in broader literacy activities. Parents/guardians indicated that they are placing more emphasis on reading in their home and that literacy activities in the home are shared literacy activities.

“ *[We] read more, play games, sing more.*

[We] read every night. [We] question his day at school and ask how he feels his day went always praise him not to correct him as much as I did before DF.

Relaying the story. Asking him for his interpretation of the story. Asking questions in order to shape the outcome of the story ending.

”

“ When I talk to him about his day, I encourage him by asking questions for him to explain in detail. Do more board games.

My child thought reading and writing were ‘work’. He loved DF and it passed into the home as fun, rather than work.

Previously we would have asked our daughter to read her book or her reader for school. This would have been the only reading we would have encouraged. Since doing DF we encourage our daughter to read signs, texts, post and many others.

The whole family, we are incorporating more family game time and more audio reading.

[We] take turns reading.

[I] Get her to read more to her sisters.

Parents/guardians also spoke about changes in how reading takes place in the home, reflecting a better understanding of the importance of reinforcing literacy in the home:

“ [We are] reading more dramatically, reading more with voices.

[I] help with breaking down the words, sounding out the letters and combining to make a complete word.

[We are doing more] storytelling and library days out.

[I] bring her to the public library more with her little brother, and we are going to do our own version of the book.

If he doesn’t understand, [I] give him the time before saying ‘you should know that’ – let him do things the way he feels most comfortable.

[We are] making reading time more fun. Encouraging my child to use descriptive language, praising child and not putting pressure on him to read.

[I] asked them questions in a more detailed way by encouraging them to explain things more vividly. [I also] encourage more educational programmes for fun.

[I] get him to sound out words more & ask him more questions about stories & songs.

[We play] games like Hedbanz and activities like I tell a word and he starts word with the last letter of my word, sudoku, puzzles.

Parents/guardians also indicated that they had a better handle on how the school teaches literacy. In this regard, they were willing to share the insights that they had gained from DF. This suggests that many parents/guardians are making a concerted effort to back up the literacy teaching at school in the home context. Typical comments included:

“ *I learned more about the way to read to her and her sisters for them to understand.*

I continued to tell or make up the stories. We are reading more books together.

I have continued to use suggestions such as reading more books, less time using devices, getting [him] to break words and sentences down, focus on phonetics and trying to make reading more fun and enjoyable.

I know how important it is to set that time aside to just talk to my son about things.

[I've] been more patient with homework tasks, and reassure her that it's ok when she makes a mistake to try again.

It was fantastic insight into different learning. We sit each night and read and write together. We also make up stories.

The fun ways of learning by incorporating games to help her learn. She finds it so much fun and doesn't realise she's learning while doing it. ”

Many parent/guardians reported changing the way they think their child should learn, often leading to more relaxed and positive parent–child relationships:

“ *I allow him to do things his way when writing or reading.*

[I've] been more patient and understanding. She has her own way of learning, her way not mine – I give her positive comments even if she makes a mistake, and try and spend more time with her to read more books and put it more into bedtime routine.

I understand now that all children have different ways to learn so I just go with what way she wants to learn.

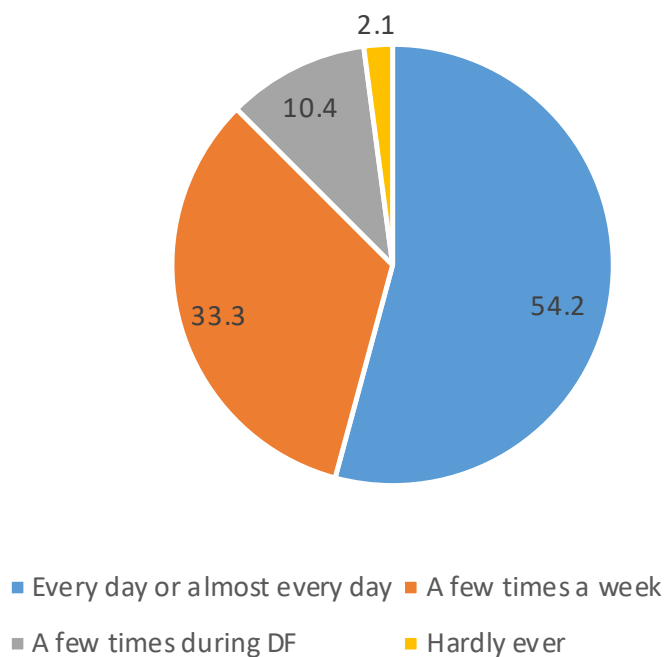
[I now go with] my child's way of learning reading her way instead of my way.

By remembering it takes time for the children to learn and they will do it the way that suits them best.

[I] try and understand the way he understands best if it's visual or otherwise. Continue reading with him. Try and include him when I am writing text or shopping list. ”

When asked about the frequency with which parents adopted these approaches, over half indicated that these new ways to support their child at home were used every day or almost every day, and one-third indicated a few times a week (Figure 28). By Time 3, just 2.6% of respondents indicated that they 'hardly ever' used these new ways to support their child, while over half (56.4%) indicated 'every day' or 'a few times a week', and 41% indicated 'a couple of times a month'.

Figure 27: Frequency of the use of new literacy approaches



In the final survey respondents were asked, ‘Do you intend to carry on with the things that you have learned during DF?’ Each of the parents/guardians responded ‘yes’. In particular, parents/guardians mentioned library visits, bedtime reading, doing things together and talking about feelings.

“ *Yes, we intend to encourage our daughter to read whenever possible. To speak about the stories we have read. Thank you for this.*

[We] will continue to read as much as possible in the future as there is major improvement. The questioning, asking for his interpretation, challenging what he has read, etc.

More time spent on doing things together, lists, games and more storytelling.

Read and listen more.

More bedtime reading, talking about feelings.

8.6 Summary

The findings presented here showed that the vast majority of parents (96%) reported that their experience of DF was ‘good’ as opposed to ‘fair’ or ‘poor’. The vast majority (98%) also felt that they had learned new ways (tips, games, activities) to support their child in the development of their literacy as a result of participation in DF, and that the influence of DF extended beyond the parent who attended, given that in over half of families (58%) other family members also adopted these new ways. Over 80% of parents reported that they implemented these new ways of supporting their child’s literacy development either ‘every day’ at home or ‘a few times a week’.

Parental responses at Time 2 suggest that the majority of parents felt that DF had a positive influence on their outlook. The majority of parents indicated change in self since participation in DF, with 77.1% reporting 'some change', 16.7% reporting 'a lot of changes' and just 6.3% indicating that they had not noticed any change in self.

Change was particularly evident regarding building literacy relationships in the family. Parents were very positive about DF for providing information and advice on how to support their child's learning at home.

Change was also evident regarding building literacy relationships between the family and the school. DF appears to have been less successful in helping parents build up a support network to support the family literacy environment or in making parents more willing to come into the school.

However, after DF, just over half of parents agreed that the programme 'made me feel more willing to talk to my child's teacher' and 'more able to talk and work with other parents' (53.3%). Survey findings from Time 1 and Time 2 showed an increase in the confidence level of parents in seeking support from teachers but also other parents.

9. Summary and discussion

9.1 Introduction

Doodle Families (DF) is a standardised family literacy initiative conducted in schools. It involves a one-hour session for parents/guardians and a separate one-hour session for children in first class each week for eight weeks. The purpose of DF is to strengthen the links between the home and the school and to increase parental involvement, as well as to embed change in family literacy activities. It has been designed to be delivered in two components – one for parents/guardians and the other for children. Parents' sessions are delivered during the school day and the children's sessions are delivered after school.

DF was developed as a response to requests from schools who wanted a follow-up programme to Doodle Den, the after-school programme of the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) for senior infant children, which has been found to improve children's literacy (Biggart et al., 2012). DF focuses on family literacy, recognising the importance of home literacy, families' shared experience and the need to support parents to increase literacy, better understand their children's literacy development and maximise their learning and achievement.

An evaluation of the pilot Doodle Families Programme, implemented between March and June 2015, indicates that participants felt that the Doodle Families Programme presents a valuable opportunity to schools to enhance family literacy skills, and that it can contribute to further enhancement of children's literacy, cognitive, social and emotional skills in first class (Bourke and Higgins, 2016). The evaluation of the pilot found that many elements of the programme were successful. One of the key benefits of the programme was the opportunity for children and parents to spend dedicated time together engaging in fun literacy activities and enhancing of the parent-child relationship as a result of this.

In line with the aims and objectives of DF set out by CDI, the key research questions for the evaluation were:

- How effective is school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy, from the perspective of parents/guardians?
- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities with their children?
- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian knowledge and confidence of how to best support children's learning at home?
- What is the influence of DF on the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers?

9.2 Methodological approach

This independent evaluation was conducted by academics at Maynooth University, with the specific remit to evaluate parental outcomes. Given the dearth of systematic analyses of family literacy programmes in the Irish context, a quantitative approach was adopted for the DF evaluation. Data were gathered using surveys that were administered to parents/guardians at three points in time. Adopting a quasi-experimental approach, the research instruments sought to capture both 'before participation' and 'after participation' in DF measures. Capturing 'before' measures – measures of the family literacy environment and parent/guardian attitudes towards family literacy practices before participation in DF – made it possible to determine the possibility for change over time. Thus, we used this design strategy to capture the family

literacy environment before and after participation in DF to determine whether DF has had an influence on parent outcomes and the family literacy environment immediately after participation, but also six months after participation (in the short term).

Data were collected from the same participants at three points in time, adding a longitudinal dimension to the study. A key strength of a study that captures the same respondents over a period of time is its ability to measure change in outcomes at the individual level. That is, it provides the opportunity to observe individual patterns of change. Such data provide an opportunity for inference regarding the effect/influence of an intervention or exposure – in this case, participation in DF.

Analysis of the baseline data at Time 1 indicates that DF is successful in attracting a diverse range of parents/guardians including non-native English speakers and those who have not previously engaged with CDI or who were previously not actively involved with the school. While it was not possible to explore patterns of non-response, greater levels of disadvantage among DF respondents at Time 1 are evident compared with the national average, particularly in terms of economic situation and number of books in the home. There was, however, some evidence to suggest bias in the sample at Time 1 in terms of education level. That is, parents/guardians with very low levels of education appear to be under-represented among the DF sample, suggesting some non-response bias in our sample of respondents. This may be an unintended consequence of the selection criteria used by CDI to select children into DF.

9.3 Key findings

- How effective is school and community interagency working with families on the development of children's literacy, from the perspective of parents/guardians?

While an exploration of children's outcomes was beyond the remit of this evaluation, we considered how parents/guardians perceive any change in their children's literacy behaviours. By Time 2, parents/guardians indicated that there were positive outcomes for their child in terms of oral language and storytelling, reading, writing and the school experience more generally. This was particularly the case regarding learning more generally, as well as writing and school attendance. However, the pre- and post-measures of reading behaviour in the home provide no evidence to suggest that participation in DF had statistically changed parent/guardian perceptions of the development of children's literacy, either immediately after attending DF or in the following six months.

These findings also extend to the use of technology for literacy. While the data indicate some evidence of redirection of the use of technology for digital literacy immediately after participation in DF, the evaluation finds no evidence to suggest any change in the use of digital literacy practices as a result of participation in DF.

These findings suggest that the model of interagency working that is embedded in DF has not been particularly effective on the development of children's literacy (despite positive subjective perceptions by parents/guardians at Time 2). However, it is important to note that 96% of parents before attending DF indicated that their child was already involved in reading at home.

- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian attitudes, awareness and skills to practise effective family literacy activities with their children?

Our statistical analyses show that DF had no influence on the literacy behaviours and attitudes of parents/guardians themselves. This is not surprising, given that previous research indicates that parent/guardian

reading behaviours may take a longer period of time to change (Reder, 2013; Reder and Bynner, 2008; Swain and Cara, 2017).

However, DF did have a positive influence on shared reading activities in the home, particularly in terms of enhancing engagement in supportive reading activities and engagement in shared literacy and writing practices immediately after completing the family literacy initiative. While there was no evidence of an ongoing short-term influence of DF after six months, there was, however, one exception. The statistical analysis shows a statistically significant positive influence of DF on shared reading practices between parents/guardians and children, both immediately after DF and after six months. These important literacy activities include asking about new words, taking turns reading, re-reading favourite books, re-telling the story, asking questions and talking about the book. Furthermore, the effect size was 'medium' immediately after DF and 'large' six months later. The qualitative data presented in Chapter 8 support this finding that parents/guardians were able to make changes in the home literacy environment and transfer best practice into the home, making learning more meaningful in the home.

- What is the influence of DF on parent/guardian knowledge and confidence of how to best support children's learning at home?

In the survey at Time 1, just over 55% of respondents indicated that they were motivated to participate in DF in order to increase confidence in helping their child with their homework. The results of statistical testing show that DF has a large and statistically positive influence on parent/guardian confidence levels around school literacies – literacies valued in school settings – immediately after DF, but not in the short term. This suggests that DF is in some way associated with a significant increase in parent/guardian confidence levels, if only immediately after attendance.

Even more importantly, there was strong evidence to suggest that DF has an influence on parent/guardian understanding of learning processes used by the school, as a large and statistically significant positive influence on parent/guardian knowledge of learning processes and learning needs was found both immediately after DF and in the short term. Clearly, DF is supporting and enabling parents/guardians to have a better understanding of the learning processes used by the school, specifically with regard to how reading is taught, but also with regard to knowledge of the learning needs of their child.

We also observed that the number of books in the home for both adults and children increased at each of the three time points, and the statistical analysis indicates a positive change in the number of books in the home for both adults and children immediately after DF. However, a short-term influence of DF (six months later) on the number of books in the home was evident in relation to books for adults only.

- What is the influence of DF on the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers?

Before DF, the vast majority (at least 80%) of parents/guardians reported that they are 'confident' or 'very confident' in asking teachers, friends or family for support. Survey findings at each time point showed an increase in the confidence level of parents in seeking support from teachers but also other parents. Statistical tests show a small but statistically significant positive influence of DF on parent/guardian confidence levels in seeking support immediately after participating, but no such influence in the short term. These findings suggest some areas for improvement, particularly concerning effective ways to enhance parent-teacher relationships over a longer period of time, but also opportunities to develop social capital among parents.

9.4 Recommendations

Our dominant implication for policy and practice based on these findings is that family literacy provision should remain funded and supported by government educational policy and social inclusion policy. While small-scale in nature, this evaluation points clearly to immediate and short-term effects of DF on the home literacy environment. Our findings indicate that CDI should continue to build up and maintain partnerships with schools over the long term and roll out DF in more schools.

The data presented here suggest an over-reliance on school-related reading materials before and after attending DF. Thus, we recommend that any further DF programme seek to increase the scope of reading materials used by children. Previous research reports positive outcomes for literacy programmes that also place emphasis on authentic (real-life) literacy activities (Purcell-Gates et al., 2012). Given the prevalence of the use of technology among children, further DF programmes should also attend to the way in which literacy is being transformed and how technology can be used in a meaningful and relevant way by families.

While there is evidence to suggest that DF is supporting and enabling parents/guardians to build relationships around literacy, our findings suggest some areas for improvement, particularly concerning effective ways to enhance parent–teacher relationships over a longer period of time, but also opportunities to develop social capital among parents. The mechanism of social capital in the development of children’s educational attainment and the development of adult literacy has long been noted by sociologists of education.

Future DF programmes should pay attention to the gender of respondents. In this study there were clear gender patterns – almost all respondents were female, with few males (fathers/grandparents) taking part. The roll-out of future DF programmes should attempt to reach a greater gender balance among participants. This is important, given that previous research in the Irish context and beyond has highlighted the reproduction of expected gender norms through family literacy initiatives (Morgan et al., 2009; Rose and Atkin, 2011; Rose, 2013). More flexible modes of delivery may need to be considered to better capture opportunities to develop family literacy within families.

While take-up and participation in the programme and the evaluation were high, this small-scale study has important lessons for avoiding non-response and attrition bias. Future evaluations should provide more time for more careful planning when recruiting parents/guardians for DF. More lead-in time is required by any research team to notify participants in a timely manner, in order to boost response and attrition rates.

Finally, the limitations of future research could be remedied in future research. Beyond the size of the sample, a limitation of this evaluation was that it was limited to parent/guardian outcomes and measures of the home literacy environment. Literacy gains among children should also be examined to evaluate the influence of DF. This should extend to non-quantitative outcomes including children’s enjoyment of using literacies. With a larger sample size, future research should also consider if the influence of DF on outcomes for parents and children extends to all, differentiating between high and low achievers and those with parents who have both high and low levels of education.

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Appendix

Table A1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

	All respondents at T1	Respondents who completed at T1 and T2	Respondents who completed at T1 and T3
Gender of the Child			
Male	47.6	51.0	39.5
Female	52.4	49.0	60.5
Age of Respondent			
24–40	69.8	77.6	69.0
41–50	20.6	16.3	26.2
51+	6.3	6.1	4.8
Relationship to child			
Mother/stepmother/female carer	85.7	90.2	86.0
Father/stepfather/male carer	7.9	3.9	9.3
Grandmother	6.3	5.9	4.7
Highest level of education			
Primary education or less	4.8	2.0	4.7
Lower secondary	9.5	11.8	11.6
Upper secondary	27.0	21.6	18.6
Technical or vocational	30.2	31.4	37.2
Certificate or diploma	19.0	23.5	16.3
Higher education degree	9.5	9.8	11.6
Family structure			
Living with spouse/partner	73.0	78.4	79.1
Not living with spouse/partner	27.0	21.6	20.9
Income difficulty of household			
With great difficulty	1.6	0.0	2.4
With difficulty	8.1	8.0	9.5
With some difficulty	41.9	40.0	33.3
Fairly easily	32.3	32.0	38.1
Easily	8.1	12.0	9.5
Very easily	8.1	8.0	7.1

Table A1: Demographic characteristics of respondents, cont.

	All respondents at T1	Respondents who completed at T1 and T2	Respondents who completed at T1 and T3
Language used in the home			
English native language of PCG	76.2	73.5	76.7
English not native language PCG	23.8	26.5	23.3
English main language used with child			
Yes	79.3	77.6	82.5
No	20.7	22.4	17.5
Books in home for adults at T1			
None	9.8	11.8	9.3
≤10	41.0	39.2	37.2
10–20	23.0	23.5	25.6
21–30	11.5	11.8	11.6
More than 30	14.8	13.7	16.3
Books in home for children at T1			
None	0.0	0.0	0.0
≤10	24.2	23.5	18.6
10–20	22.6	19.6	18.6
21–30	14.5	17.6	14.0
More than 30	38.7	39.2	48.8
Previous school and interagency			
% helped out in a primary school classroom	27.9	26.0	30.2
% attended another family literacy programme	26.2	26.0	27.9
% attended other CDI programme	8.2	8.0	9.3
Parental resources and contact with school			
% child has suitable place to do homework	96.8	100.0	97.6
% has a library nearby that is easy to get to	90.3	91.8	81.4
% feels that school provides information	89.7	89.1	80.5
Motivation for participation			
To be more involved in my child's school life and education	88.9	92.2	93.0
To learn how to help my child with his/her homework	76.2	78.4	76.7

Table A1: Demographic characteristics of respondents, cont.

	All respondents at T1	Respondents who completed at T1 and T2	Respondents who completed at T1 and T3
To learn how the school teaches my child to read and write	73.0	76.5	72.1
To increase my confidence in helping my child with his/her homework	55.6	58.8	51.2
To improve my own writing	25.4	23.5	23.3
To increase my confidence in my own literacy skills	30.2	27.5	30.2
To improve my own reading	23.8	19.6	20.9
Mean age of respondent	36.7	35.5	36.6
Mean number of dependent children	2.5	2.44	2.38
N	64	51	43

Note: Missing cases excluded. Because of the small number of cases involved, cannot compute statistical tests for questions relating to language used in the home

Table A2: Parent/guardian perceptions of reading activities by children

	Survey	Every day	Sometimes /Frequently	Never
Storybooks	T1	39.2	56.9	3.9
	T2	60.8	37.3	2.0
	T3	25.6	74.4	0.0
Newspapers	T1	0.0	25.5	74.9
	T2	2.0	36.7	61.2
	T3	0.0	59.1	36.4
Comic books	T1	2.2	47.8	50.0
	T2	0.0	66.0	34.0
	T3	0.0	61.9	38.1
Magazines	T1	0.0	33.3	66.7
	T2	3.9	50.9	45.1
	T3	0.0	52.4	47.6

Table A2: Parent/guardian perceptions of reading activities by children (cont.)

	Survey	Every day	Sometimes /Frequently	Never
Personal letters	T1	2.1	37.5	60.4
	T2	2.1	56.3	41.7
	T3	0.0	61.9	38.1
Personal notes	T1	10	50.0	40.0
	T2	3.9	72.5	23.5
	T3	2.3	68.2	25.0
Recipes/ Cooking instructions	T1	2.0	46.0	52.0
	T2	2.0	60.8	37.3
	T3	0.0	73.7	23.8
Religious materials	T1	0.0	31.3	68.8
	T2	8.0	40.0	52.0
	T3	2.3	42.9	54.8
Career/ job-related newsletters	T1	4.3	6.4	89.4
	T2	0.0	23.5	76.5
	T3	0.0	12.2	87.8
Student homework assignments	T1	41.7	31.2	27.1
	T2	45.1	29.4	25.5
	T3	26.8	53.6	19.5
Notes sent home from school	T1	13.7	64.8	21.6
	T2	23.5	56.9	19.6
	T3	14.3	73.8	11.9
Food/drink menus	T1	8	78	14
	T2	11.8	82.3	5.9
	T3	4.7	90.7	4.7
TV guide	T1	10.4	31.3	58.3
	T2	15.7	45.1	39.2
	T3	0.0	42.8	57.1
Labels on food	T1	12.2	57.2	30.6
	T2	12	66	22
	T3	19	59.5	21.4

Table A2: Parent/guardian perceptions of reading activities by children (cont.)

	Survey	Every day	Sometimes /Frequently	Never
Catalogues or other Consumer products	T1	10.2	46.9	42.9
	T2	7.8	70.6	21.6
	T3	9.5	73.8	16.7
The phone book	T1	0.0	12.5	87.5
	T2	3.9	13.7	82.4
	T3	0.0	19.6	80.5



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