

Sure Start on the Ocean Play and Learning Event

14th July 2003 - Kobi Nazrul
Centre. London E1

An Evaluation report

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1. Introduction

The Play and learning event held on the 14th July 2003 as part of a wider evaluation process to improve the delivery of the Sure Start programme. The objectives of the event were to provide information, to get responses on the work of the play and learning theme and to identify, with the participants, ways to improve the connections between parents and programme.

This report is a summary of the event.

2. General

2.1 Event arrangements

2.1.1 Location

The event was held at Kobi Nozrul Centre, Hanbury St, London

2.1.2 Format

The format of the meeting was a mix of presentations, role-play, theatre, feedback and group discussions. The programme for the event is enclosed in **Appendix 1**. The event started with an introduction to the day and the process for the event. Sure Start workers provided an introduction to the process of a Play and Learning drop in, and this was followed by the parents working in small groups to discuss the themes raised from the drop-in role-play. This was then followed by Julie Morgan, who gave a presentation on the Toy Library and introduced some of the toys the parents could borrow.

The Half Moon theatre group then, through puppet and acting, introduced the 'Let's Talk' book. This was followed by a socio-drama where some of the parents took part. Afterwards, the parents worked in small groups discussing some of the themes raised from the previous sessions, and the parents were particularly asked to make comments on the Sure Start's work. The event ended with a closing session by the Half Moon theatre group.

2.1.3 Attendance

A total of approximately 10 parents with their children attended, representing a range of users of the Sure Start services.

3. Feedback from the group sessions on the play and learning drop-ins and Sure Start

During the small group sessions the parents were asked to feedback on the drop-in role-play, the Kheli-Boli bags and the work of the Sure start as a whole. They were also asked to discuss the benefits they are seeing as a result of the drop-ins for the children and what improvements could be made. Below is a summary of the feedback.

Play and learning drop-ins.

The parents found the drop-in role play session 'enjoyable' and one parent said she 'felt like a child again... it brought back memories of childhood'. All the parents thought the play, the singing and storytelling was excellent, and one of the mums stated that the most positive thing about the songs and story telling is that they are done with actions and noise, which encourages the children to make noises and play.

The parents were asked whether they were seeing any benefits of the drop-in for the children and what these are.

Most of the parents said they could see the benefits and they stated these as follows:

"Since going to the drop-ins with my child my social skills has improved and developed"

"Children are getting into a routine, which is seen as a good thing"

"Playing at home is difficult due to other demands. Going to the drop-ins means that this time is dedicated to playing and child-parent interaction"

One of the mums stated that she has had problems in getting her older children to attend school. However, with her youngest child, she feels that the child may settle better in school because the child has been attending the drop-ins. The other mums echoed this view by stating that attending the drop-ins would mean that the children would be ready and prepared to go the nursery.

The parents also discussed other benefits such as 'meeting other mums', 'their children getting to know other children', 'the children building up and showing confidence', and that the 'children enjoy play and the materials... and that it is

different from home'. One mum said that with her child there is a 'happy feeling when they get home'.

In terms of the improvements to the drop-in the mums were mainly concerned the environment such as 'the space for drop-ins is too small', 'the door to drop-ins is hard to open, 'St Dunstan is small and upstairs' and that 'there should be an outside play area'. The last view was the most popular, in that the mums wanted 'more outdoor activities such as climbing, water play and sports play. One mum said that this would be beneficial in that 'if there were more outdoor activities then the parents would feel more confident playing with their kids'.

Some of the mums said that the Play and learning groups should be held Monday-Friday at a set time. Some thought that 'morning would be better'.

The Kheli Boli bags

The Kheli Boli bags are used in as part of the speech and language sessions. They were distributed to the parents to discuss. The mums found the bags useful and easy to use. Some wanted the material to be in Bengali. One parent who had used them before said that the bags were helpful to her in that they helped her to talk and play with her child. Another parent made the point that many parents are given toys without knowing how to play with them, but with the Kheli Boli bags the instructions are good and easy to follow.

General Views about Sure Start

The mums were asked their views on the Sure Start in general. The parents were very positive about the Sure Start. Some of the comments were:

"The staff members are very friendly"

"Sure start is never-ending, in a good way. There are always lots of things going on"

"Sure start helps develop speech development and one of the drop-ins is focused on S&L"

"Trips and outings are very good, people are able to get out of the estate and this is good"

"The Play bus is exciting. The kids love it and look forward to it and they always reminding us about it"

The mums also talked about things they would like to see. For example one parent said that the Sure Start should have more books and reading activities because the nurseries have books and reading sessions and this would help to prepare the child for this and another said she would like to see more active parent involvement. One mum said that there should be a regular Sure Start newsletter and publications, to show what is going on and what has happened so far.

4. Discussion

The objectives for play and learning in the Sure Start are to:

- promote parental awareness and confidence in playing with their children
- acknowledge the importance of play for children's social inclusion

These themes were explored during the event. The use of play and the participation of parents in the event were seen as key in informing the programme of progress and areas for development. This part of the report will focus on the above objectives but will be organised in terms of process, mechanism and outcomes. What do we mean by this?

For example, the play and learning component of the Sure Start programme aims to promote parent-child interactions through play as a means of promoting child development. This can be achieved through *processes* that promote parents' understanding of their children and of the importance of play in learning for children. *Mechanisms* such as drop-ins, visits, outings, using books, and the use of other community facilities such as libraries are used to develop parents' confidence in reading stories and playing with their children. *Outcomes* are things such as better bonding and interaction with parent and child, improved confidence of the parent and the preparedness of the child for nursery and school. These are but a few positives things that could arise from the processes and mechanisms for play and learning.

For the evaluation we would like this section to focus on the processes, mechanisms and outcomes of the event as well as the programme of play and learning in the Sure Start. This is because there are many similarities between the processes and mechanisms used in the event as well as the programme.

Process

The process used in the event incorporates the notion of peer learning and learning by doing - a situation where parents can learn from each other - and on social inclusion, where parents can meet a variety of workers and other parents.

The parents were very familiar with this approach and during the event it was noticeable that some parents were confident in participating in the role plays and activities. Participation and involvement of parents is a major theme for the Sure Start and the event and the play and learning activities are producing strong learning points for an involvement strategy, such as using play, role-play, theatre and so on. Role-play and socio-drama were used to widen the parents' participation. Some parents became actively involved and feedback showed that they thoroughly enjoyed. An interesting learning point is that these processes could be used in Play and learning sessions to get feedback.

Mechanism

The event used a few mechanism devised to increase involvement and participation of excluded groups such as a crèche and transport. These worked well in that the turnout for the event was satisfactory.

The small group sessions worked well. These were very well facilitated by the Sure Start workers.

Half Moon Young People's Theatre Company's Let's Talk routine was well received and created a positive environment for the Mums to respond to and use the book.

Outcomes

The main outcome was that it appeared that the knowledge and attitude of parents to play and learning was positive and good. In the feedback it was clear that the mums understood the benefits of play and during the socio-drama role-play the parent volunteers demonstrated strong competence in interacting with the child while reading.

The event also brought out skills in participating. The mums were confident and comfortable with each other and the workers. Parents also showed a willingness to engage with community resources (such as the toy library) to promote their own learning.

5. Conclusions

The programme is keen to find ways of getting feedback from parents in a reliable way and in ways that parents and children are comfortable. It is keen to try out new ways for feedback: ways that are not restricted by the traditional assumptions about the community's like and dislikes.

The programme's objective of moving towards a community development model is reflected through its activities on the play and learning theme and this was

mirrored by the way the evaluation event was organised. In particular the work is being steered towards collective /groups activities and this is producing a qualitative representation of the changes in the engagement with children in their early years.

The event also represented a dynamism and vibrancy, which cannot be easily reproduced in a report. Analysis of the video of the event may be used to describe the dynamism.

The event also informed the programme about the parents' awareness of what contributes to children's development and the skills that they have developed.

However, the caveat is that the findings presented on the event cannot be taken on their own as evidence. They should be viewed along with feedback from other exercises from the overall local evaluation.

Finally, the staff members were heavily involved in the organisation and running of the event. It was observed that they were comfortable and confident in running the event and demonstrated competence in using their skills for the event.

6. Recommendations

1. The event provided an outline of a process for obtaining feedback from parents about themes for the Sure Start. Currently the model includes:

Process: Peer learning, play, theatre, visual aids, creative setting and involvement of parents

Mechanisms: Small group work, facilitation by worker/parent, mix of presentation and activities and storytelling/songs

Outcomes: Parents actively involved, Staff develops skills, parents talk about their experiences, confidence and self-esteem encouraged and built

2. The use of video to evaluate the event is recommended to capture the richness and dynamism of the event

3. It is recommended to test the model with other themes

Appendices

Appendix 1: Timetable of the event

Objectives:

- To get feedback on the play and learning work: Play & learn sessions, speech and language service, and toy lending library
- To show parents how they can use Let's Talk book with their children.
- To get some feedback about other Sure Start work

Plan of the day

The set:

- Centre stage set up - a play and learn sessions
- Sidestables. With books, toys and Kheli- Bholi (Play-Talk) Bags
- Music plays in the background:

Session 1

Demonstration of play and learn sessions with parent participation.

Session 2

Review in Small Groups

Session 3.

Presentation on Toy Library by Julie Morgan

Session 4

Let's Talk- Half Moon theatre ...

Review/ parents try out/ actors' help

Highlight importance of trying, having fun, relaxing, enjoying, making time, value of simple things, imagination and making stories

Session 5

Socio-drama around using Sure Start

Session 6

A game for closing the play sessions: harmonising sound, movement cloth or other material.

End Music in the background

Session 7 Food and mingling.