Department of Education

An Evaluation of the
Quality Time Project

Final Report

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Pam Graham
Ian Hall
Jill Clark
Elaine Hall
Sue McElrue
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The Research Context

"Parents are children’s first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on the child’s development and learning.”  
(DfEE/QCA, 2000, p.9)

The links between social disadvantage and educational underachievement have been a staple of research and policy discourse for much of the last three decades. Researchers have focussed on the whole on cultural differences between social groups, in an attempt to explain these links. Recent initiatives, such as Sure Start, Book Start and Talk Talk have attempted to adopt a less judgemental stance. Nevertheless, as Raban (1991) notes:

"The likelihood that children will succeed in learning to read at school depends most of all on how much they have already learned about reading before they get there." (p42).

New research (Locke et al, 2002) implies that the standards of spoken language of disadvantaged children entering early years settings are extremely prejudicial to the development of reading and writing skills and therefore the importance of intervention projects like Quality Time for the long term outcomes of children cannot be underestimated.

The national adoption of the Book Start project (Wade and Moore, 1993, 1998a, 1998b, 2000) was more than a recognition that sharing books with babies had long term benefits. It connects with other research on early intervention and parental involvement: for example, High/Scope (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993) and more specifically, research related to parental involvement in literacy, which has indicated that parental support is a crucial factor in literacy success (Hannon, 1995; MacLeod, 1995; Tett and Crowther, 1998).

A great deal of this work has concentrated on parental involvement in children's literacy at school but increasingly the importance of early learning at home has been recognised. Longitudinal studies of children (Weinberger, 1996a; Weinberger, 1996b) have revealed that there are two key experiences in children's lives which can support their development as readers: having a favourite book at the age of three and being a member of the library. Research findings from the pilot Bookstart project in Birmingham have continued to show the positive effects of Bookstart in children's "consistent and cumulative superiority" which persists through Baseline Assessment and Key Stage 1 Assessment (Wade and Moore, 1998a, p.11; 2000).

The reason for introducing Quality Time into the SRB area is based on a number of problems and issues identified by the City of Sunderland Partnership. Baseline figures relating to the Quality Time area and referred to by the Partnership indicated that:

- The percentage of children aged 4/5 achieving baseline standard in the cluster schools during 1999 was 50.5% compared to 58.2% in Sunderland and 52% across the region.
The percentage of children aged 6/7 achieving level 2 and above at Key Stage 2 in 1999 was 63.8% compared to 78% in Sunderland and 82% across the region.

The standard of English and Mathematics was below the national average.

A high number of nursery pupils had language problems with a consequent effect of below level attainment at the start of year 1.

Under achievement in reading and writing coupled with limited oral skills.

Under developed personal and social skills.

Nursery school referrals to Speech and Language Therapy were double the national average of 10%. This was compounded by lack of parental awareness and non-attendance at therapy appointments.

Twenty percent of children, although not referred for speech and language therapy, were still identified by teachers as having communication needs.

Head Teachers across the cluster schools were concerned about low attendance rates. Figures showed 7.78% authorised and unauthorised absence compared to 6.0% in Sunderland and 5.9% nationally.

(PPW, Project Appraisal Form).

Clearly, on the basis of this information, the City of Sunderland Partnership identified a need for some kind of action to address the issues in the Pennywell and Ford areas of Sunderland to:

- Encourage parents’ involvement in the development of their children’s language and communication skills
- Address issues of participation and attendance,
- Address underachievement in reading, writing and oral skills and under developed personal and social skills.

**Evaluation Aims and Objectives**

Key aims and objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Examine the progress and achievements of the Project; how do these compare with the original project appraisal and expectations set out in the delivery/implementation plan?
- Explore qualitative issues relating to the impact on the pupils
- Make recommendations for improving delivery.

We have also adopted the following research questions:

- What lessons does the Project yield in terms of good practice?
- What lessons have been learnt and what are the areas of improvement for the Project’s future activity?
- Can the project or elements of this be used as a model for others?
Methodology

Essentially the evaluation is in the form of an in-depth qualitative study underpinned by an examination of quantitative monitoring data. The methodologies we employed were therefore a combination of desk-based and fieldwork techniques. Data collection and analysis has taken the following forms:

**Documentary Analysis**

Part of the evaluation has been dedicated to an analysis of the various documentation made available by the Project. Examples included the QT Appraisal document, end of year reports (2001), and examples of parent-child evaluation forms.

**Project Case study**

This case study of the Quality Time Project has used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative data we have collected has been that which is readily available within the Project and/or from the SRB Programme. Data has included pupil absence data (1999-2001) and percentage of children achieving level 2 (or higher) in Key Stage 1 assessments.

The qualitative data relates to **processes** within the Quality Time Project, relevant to the evaluation aims set out above. Such data has been generated from interviews with a variety of stakeholders and participants.

**Progress to Date**

- Five out of the six schools taking part in the project have now been visited.
- Interviews and discussions have been conducted with:
  - Two Head Teachers and one Assistant Head Teacher
  - Nine Quality Time Assistants/Nursery nurses
  - The original Project Co-ordinator.
  - The acting Project Co-ordinator
  - The SRB111 Co-ordinator
  - The team leader for Education and Community Services
  - The Early Years manager in the EAZ;
  - Family Worker and
  - Several parents who are active in the QT project.

These in-depth discussions were essentially used to explore the views of the various stakeholders of the Project and how it is being delivered and managed.
Main Findings

The main purpose of this evaluation is to examine the impact of this project on distinct populations including:

- School and LEA staff
- Parents and Pupils and
- SRB staff.

We do not believe that the impact of the project could best be measured solely in terms of quantitative data, nor has it been possible to conduct a 'before and after' study since the Project was well established before the evaluation was commissioned.

Our emphasis has been on seeking an understanding of the interaction between pupils, school staff and LEA and SRB personnel, and how the experience is seen by all participants in terms of providing practical benefits and creating possibilities for changes in ways of working and raising attainment.

The following interim findings are based on our exploration of the context of processes, outcomes and costs. They are based on analysis of several in-depth, one-to-one interviews, which have been tape-recorded to ensure accuracy. Structured thematic analysis has formed the main approach to data analysis at this interim stage (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Project Identity

All those who have contributed to this evaluation have a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Quality Time Project. In addition, all staff acknowledged specifically that a system had been established that was successfully delivering the Quality Time Project.

One of the key strengths identified by strategic staff was the appointment of effective workers, who have maintained good organisation and management of the project and developed good relationships with parents. The project manager was described as "very, very good." The fact that local people were recruited to the project (approximately one third of the staff) has facilitated a sense of identity and feelings of ownership for many parents. Moreover, the status of the project workers being separate from the teaching staff in the schools has enabled parents to approach them with sensitive issues around their own literacy and numeracy. There were several instances of project workers acting to bridge gaps of information and services between community and education services. In addition, we found evidence that some parents themselves benefited from their experience:

“One of the parents who was employed 24 hours a week, now has two classes of ten parents doing the nursery rhymes. She’s gone from being a quality time worker to a family support worker. She’s got two groups of parents who are looking at making things and doing activities and doing nursery rhymes and these are people who are hard to reach and with attendance problems. That
has worked really well and the amount of feedback we’ve had from parents and parents volunteers... was really lovely.”

Administrative Aspects

All QT staff we interviewed are satisfied with the way that the Quality Time Project has been administered, and the project administrator was trained in finance and to NVQII then NVQIII level.

All Quality Time Assistants (QTAs) have had the opportunity to attend training sessions to prepare them for their role in the Quality Time Project. However, most if not all felt that while the training sessions had been useful, they already possessed the skills necessary to carry out their particular project duties and responsibilities:

“... they do specific things, say like the Listening Bags, or the testing. If it is relevant to you then you go on that. But quite a lot of it we already know. Sometimes they are teaching you things that you already know. It’s been broadened.” QTA.

Quality Time Assistants appeared able and confident to get on with the delivery aspect of the project without any supervision. All QT assistants said that if they had any problems they could speak to the Head Teacher or contact their line managers for advice and support.

Personnel changes will inevitably cause disruption within any project, and the QT project is no exception. Although identified as a short-term rather than a long-term problem, some QT assistants mentioned that due to managerial staff leaving for other jobs, communications had at time been a little problematic. Two key project staff, the original project manager and the administrator, left the project within two months of one another. Although this can be viewed as a mark of success (based on the quality of training and experience received within the project) - and while other projects will benefit from the expertise which staff gained through the QT Project, it has raised concerns about the effect of the disruption on the smooth running of the project.

There was a feeling that "on the ground", personal contact was needed, if not essential. One person eloquently told us about their major concern:

“The centralisation of most of the support ... It has been a good thing at the beginning of the project, but for sustainability purposes, needs to be addressed.”

All Quality Time staff highlighted the steep learning curve encountered during the initial set-up period of the project. However, both Head Teachers and QT Assistants highlighted the ways that knowledge and experience gained through the early stages of the Project had been applied to improving the delivery of Quality Time. All QT staff reported that the project was now running smoothly. Quality Time Staff suggested that the QTP management structure did not require any improvements or modifications and were content to leave it as it is.
The development of the Quality Time bags by the team at the Learning Support unit drew on the project first run in Bristol but, from the beginning, was sensitive to the needs of the particular communities and schools in the project. This reactive stance has included the development of bags for toddlers, nursery and reception children as well as bags for children in Key Stage 1 and bags covering key areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum and specific topic areas. A sense of ownership has been fostered by using the experience and expertise of teachers, nursery nurses, project workers and parents in the initial development and modification of materials.

Within one particular school we visited, we were told that in practical terms, the content of the bags (and their descriptions) were not always accessible. Firstly, a great deal of effort has been invested in preparing materials which do not rely on parents reading instructions. Secondly, the language used to describe some of the bags was not always appropriate. One parent told us how one bag was called "masses and capacity", which (perhaps understandably) was never taken out by children as they rarely understood, or found the title interesting. Much of the material has been re-worked and have now been converted from what one parent described as "teacher speak", but then are checked by teachers for accuracy. There exist over 120 different types of bags and parents are also involved in making materials for their content.

Health and safety issues were also raised in connection with the suitability of small toys, game pieces and scissors included in the QT bags. These issues have apparently been resolved as a result of regular consultation and feedback between QT staff, nursery nurses and parents:

“... the Nursery Nurses involved were actually part of setting up the bags - they gave ideas into the bags and they were all very experienced nursery nurses, very talented nursery nurses ... they decided which books, which toys, and were part of the discussions. Teachers weren’t really needed - needed, but not very much. The Nursery Nurses from all of the schools within the cluster were such experienced Nurses and they had 99% of the ideas and 99% input into this.”

This view was supported by one worker:

“They asked us to make up QT bags ourselves, what we would do and we made up a few of our own ideas, which I think they are going to do a lot more of, training, where we use our own ideas. Initially they did have teachers and they found that it has been far too hard for some of them. Parents couldn’t understand some of the language used.”

Parents’ reactions to the QT bags were taken very seriously. One interviewee recalled the development of a seaside themed bag which included seaweed and shells in it to provide sensory and exploratory experiences, but which was very unpopular with parents who did not like ‘beach rubbish’ being emptied on to their carpets! This bag was re-designed but not all complaints led to instant change, instead some provided an opportunity to discuss issues with parents, in particular when parents of boys returned bags containing dolls or other ‘girl’s’ toys.
One difficulty encountered by Quality Time personnel was the co-ordination of ordering equipment through local authority systems with the SRB spending deadlines.

**Integration and Collaboration**

Through our evaluation we found clear evidence that schools involved have integrated the Quality Time project into the 'normal' routines and unique set-up of their own particular schools, dealing with a variety of issues relating to timetables, security, parental access to school and the availability of space for the project. One QTA told us:

"Each school is different and each school knows its parents and children and physical set up of the school and they will work it to suit themselves."

There appears to be very little formal collaboration and interaction between the schools in relation to the Quality Time Project, all of the schools essentially operating the project on an individual basis but in accordance with project guidelines.

Most QTAs pointed out that they did attend project meetings at least once a year where they had the opportunity to exchange information, ideas and experiences about Quality Time. While most of the QTAs expressed the view that meeting with other QTAs more regularly would be useful as a means to share knowledge and experience about the QT Project, they also felt that it would not be practical since some QTAs are also nursery nurses and are in effect constrained by their formal hours and duties:

"We have meetings not more than twice a year when we can exchange information and experiences."

"Yeah, we have training days and if we go to the office there are often people there. We've had a lot of training on listening bags. Actually I think there is a meeting in August when we all get together and share ideas."

While one worker suggests that more frequent formal project meetings may be impractical because of their differences in work roles, geographical location and time commitments - some QTAs felt that it would be important to have the opportunity to meet formally more regularly. This is perhaps particularly important given the changes in managerial staff and that the QT project has a specific life span.

**Measuring Impact?**

All of the Head Teachers and QT Assistants felt that the QT Project was benefiting both parents and children. However, they recognised that it might be difficult to 'un-pick' all the various factors or projects (other than the Quality Time Project) that may have had an impact on parents and children. In other words, there is a sense among Head Teachers and QTAs that the QT project ‘must’ be having an impact of some kind or another, although what this exact impact may be is not known:
“I think it eventually will, yes. As it has just started, I do feel that it will have an impact especially when it is carried on to reception and then Years 1 and 2 and then onto Year 3 definitely, it has to work.”

A Head Teacher said:

“... it must be benefiting parents and children but how you un-pick that from everything else that is going on I don’t know... anything that parents do over and above what they do at school has got to be a bonus and I think it must be benefiting them.”

Measuring the impact of any project is fraught with difficulties. There are clear indications that some formal and informal monitoring and tracking systems were built into the project during its development. This is inevitable given that SRB funding is dependent on such monitoring.

A major feature of the Quality Time Project is the provision of a variety of bags, such as the Talk Talk bags, Book Start bags, Toddler bags and Listening bags, etc. Through simple observation of returned bags, QTAs can ascertain which bags have been used by which children, and to discover which bags are under-utilised. QTAs, for example, stated that they were aware when a bag had been returned unused as its contents would be undisturbed:

“You can tell when the bag hasn’t been used nothing has been filled in and there is a paper clip on the top that hasn’t been moved.”

“Some of them [bags] come back and they have not been touched. When you asked the children if they enjoyed the bag or what was in the bag, they don’t know. Its been just put away....”

The use (or not) of the bags appears to be a direct form of monitoring for QTAs. They appear to have developed a number of proactive strategies to deal with the problem of unused bags. These include directly (but sensitively!) asking parents whether they have had any problems with the bag - to more direct action involving the QTA personally working through the bags with children. We found two particular QTAs worked in this latter way - and one in particular acted as a parent by proxy during break times and lunch hours using Quality Time bags with those children whose parents were not participating:

“Some of the parents don’t work through the bag with the child so some of the bags come back they same way they went out. So, those children I’ve started working with during my break times and lunch times.”

Another told us:

“We share a bag during story time because if the parents are not doing it at home at least they are getting something at school.”

However, we are not sure whether these are isolated cases, or whether this is happening across the schools. While it is commendable that some QTAs are so
committed that they are prepared to work with the children themselves in their own time, it does raise the issue that the work being done is at the exclusion of some parents. Children can clearly benefit from this input, but without parental involvement, the work may not meet the aims and objectives of the Quality Time project, as most QTAs pointed out, “to involve parents in their children’s learning” and for the:

“... parents and the children to spend some quality time together with the bag to promote literacy and math’s skills with the parent as well as the child.”

However, it appears that as long as there has been some interaction and involvement in the home from some member of the family, then this is sufficient. Clearly, if there is no parental involvement at all, QTAs and Nursery Nurses taking it upon themselves to work through a bag with the child is still another positive strategy to ensure that children are getting some benefit:

“Even if they are not doing everything in that bag it’s getting into the house, the book’s getting into the house somebody in the family is quite likely to do something with that child so it doesn’t matter if everything is not being done or it’s not being done exactly as we had planned, the contact is there and the start is there and they come back and ask, can we have another one?”

The important point here is that QTAs have developed strategies to deal with this problem and it is not simply brushed under the carpet.

A further complication was reported by Quality Time Assistants we spoke to. They mentioned that while parents were made aware of how the bags should be used, they (the QTAs) were not in a position to determine whether they had been used as intended in the home for example, whether the children had simply used the bags themselves or whether the parents had actually been involved. Some of the QTAs ask the children to explain how the bags have been used and in some cases it is reported that the child has worked alone or has worked with an older sibling, or as expected, with a parent or guardian. Again, QTAs employ various strategies to introduce parents to the QT project and in particular, how to use the bags. One QTA said in this respect:

“... we have coffee mornings within the nursery setting and we have the bags there and we are with the children and the bags, and the parents are seeing the things we are asking, what we are doing, what we are using them for and they [the parents] are then encouraged to play with them, the bags in the nursery. We say to the parents, it doesn’t have to be perfect as long as you get something out of it and the children have got some time with you. Even if they don’t colour a picture in fair enough but they’ve had some time with you.”

Once again, if problems do arise with some of the parents and their children in the home setting, there is the Family Worker to fall back on.

“... if families were identified, she [family worker] would make contact with them. She was not from Social Services or anything like that.”
While staff appeared satisfied with the means employed to determine the impact of the QT Project, that is, parent evaluation sheets and the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS), some staff nevertheless expressed concerns. While all QT staff mentioned the BPVS and the parent evaluation sheets contained in the QT bags, others had heard that PIPS was going to be used as a measure of impact on children:

“... It’s the BPVS. This is the only test we use in nursery but they use PIPS in reception. We do the testing at the start and at the end. Results are sent back to the co-ordinator.”

Monitoring seems key to the QT project, and various attempts are made, "every thing is on a monitoring database system:

“Every pack has an evaluation sheet... We always make a character on the evaluation, either Bob the Builder, smiling or sad, something like that and all the kids have to do is tick it whether they liked it or not and then we’ve got a box for parents comments.”

Measuring Success?

One QTA suggested that it would be difficult to determine whether the children had progressed directly as a result of Quality Time, or whether they had made progress through 'normal' school work, saying:

“... the difficult thing about that [assessing impact] is that the children are also being taught in school. The only benchmark you could possibly have is if you are testing children who take the bags and children who don’t. But there would be a difference in these children anyway.”

Equally, wherever there are SRB funding and programmes, there is inevitably several initiatives or projects which run simultaneously:

“You’ve got so many initiatives – how can you say exactly what Quality Time does? But there is tremendous feedback, I suppose its qualitative.”

When talking about 'success' or 'impact', the language used varies depending on the person’s role within the QT project. The evaluation revealed that views of the achievements made were generally positive:

"When you see some of the pictures an the activities they [the children] come back with and read some of the comments it just makes it all worthwhile. They’re saying ‘my child never moved and didn’t watch the television all night because they were doing their bags’. Some of the comments you get back you think ‘gosh its worth it’.”

“Some of the work is absolutely brilliant with the parents and the bags and their enthusiasm has been brilliant. Its just probably time restrictions and resources have hindered what they do.”
The level of success appears to be dependent upon the priority given to it by key individuals within the school:

“There are differences in how it’s delivered and what priorities they give it but in some of the schools where it’s given a high priority it’s fabulous.”

Our evaluation confirmed this, and we used one particular school as a case study and highlighted this as a perfect example of 'good practice'. We were told that other projects based in Southern England had visited this particular school in order to shape their own QT projects. Within this school, although a part-time Family Worker post exists based in this school, there are plans to make the post full-time. During our observation, parents spoke of there being a feeling of "community spirit" within the school, illustrated by the fact that there was usually a heavy parent presence in the school throughout the week. Parents we spoke to described at length the differences that they had seen since the start of the QT project. Previously, only one of the parents we spoke to had visited the school, and all the parents reported that they felt confident and comfortable spending time in the school. Most parents we spoke to had started attending training courses - such as First Aid, a computer course, and some had received training to help them with their literacy and numeracy - which in turn helped them to work with their own children.

The Family Worker described the Head teacher as "thrilled to bits that the parents come in", and the Head herself described the project as “a tremendous success” and said “its all down to [Family Worker]".

Quantitative Evidence

The Quality Time Project provided three tables to show what impact the Project is having within the cluster schools. Starting with Table 1 below and taking the figures at face value, it seems to show some positive outcomes. Percentages given in column 4 appear to show that that those pupils who regularly took QTP bags home have shown improvements in their personal and social development above and beyond normal monthly progression based on the BPVS test.

Table 1 also appears to highlight the fact that, while most schools have done remarkably well in engaging pupils in the Project such as, Grindon and Pallion primary schools, others are lagging behind in some respects. South Hylton and the Pennywell Neighbourhood Centre, for example, appear to have lower percentages of pupils regularly taking bags home, when compared with the other schools.

Out of the 183 children who were apparently taking bags home on a regular basis, 128 apparently achieved or fulfilled output 1J*. We have no background data concerning these children and their past performance. Neither do we have any details about the 78 children who were apparently not taking QT bags home regularly.
Table 1: Children benefiting from Personal and Social Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nursery</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>% in QTP</th>
<th>No. in QTP</th>
<th>% Showing improvement</th>
<th>SRB (1J)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grindon</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havelock</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallion</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Hylton</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennywell Nursery</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennywell Neighbourhood Centre</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1J indicates the number of children who will achieve the recognised national standard in personal and social development at Baseline Assessment Tests

Key:
1. Nursery school
2. Number of children in year group
3. Percentage of children taking QTP (Talk Talk) packs home regularly.
4. Number of children taking QTP bags home.
5. Percentage of children showing significant improvements (1J) over and above normal monthly progression using BPVS tests.
6. Number of children achieving 1J.

Looking at table 2 below, columns 3 and 5, it is clear to see that forecast percentages for children achieving Level 2 or higher in SATs, have been exceeded by actual percentages of children achieving level 2 or higher. While some of the differences are small, it is clear that some of the schools appear to have progressed more than others (Grindon, Havelock and Quarry, stand out in this respect).

Looking at columns 6, 7 and 8, it also seems clear that those pupils who have been using the QT bags for SATs support have benefited. Again there are some interesting variations. Quarry, for example, only had 45% of its children who were using the QT bags for SATs support actually matching up with output 1B. Compare this with 100% of children at South Hylton or 96% at Pallion.

Out of the 242 who achieved Level 2 or higher in their SATs scores, 180 appear to have fulfilled output 1B on the basis that they used the QT bags for SATs support. Unfortunately we do not possess any data about these children and their past performance.

Nevertheless, it seems that 180 children have made progress in their educational attainment in accordance with the aims and objectives of output 1B. While this remains below the forecast figure of 334 (see Table 3 below regarding QT outputs), it is nevertheless a good achievement. Again, we do not appear to have any information about the 59 children across all the schools who do not appear to have benefited in their SATs results or to have been engaged in the QT Project.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Pupil No.</th>
<th>RWM Average</th>
<th>L2+</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grindon Infants</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havelock</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallion Primary</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Hylton Primary</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>St. Annes RC Primary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quarry View Primary</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>301</strong></td>
<td><strong>202</strong></td>
<td><strong>242</strong></td>
<td><strong>179.9</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Quality Time Project

Key:
1. School name
2. Number of children in year group
3. Projected percentage of children achieving L2+ in year 2 SATs
4. Projected number of children achieving L2+ in year 2 SATs
5. Actual percentage of children achieving L2+ in SATs (May 2001) after 1 year of QTP.
6. Actual number of children achieving L2+ in SATs (May 2001) After 1 year of QTP.
7. Percentages of children using the Quality Time packs for SATs support.
8. 1B: Number of children benefiting from the project assigned to enhance/improve educational attainment.

While Table 3 below, provides a great deal of information, and most, if not all of it, looks positive, we have focused on what we believe are key outputs, namely, pupil progress and some elements of project progress and including among others, pupils enhanced/improved attainment (1B); Personal and Social Development (1J), etc.

**Pupils-enhanced/improved attainment (1B):**

While 179.9 children have been identified as benefiting directly through their participation in the project, the projected number of children (334) has not been achieved. It would be interesting to find out how this figure was actually reached and whether it had been set too high. If it was not, however, set too high, then it may be necessary to look a little closer at how the projected figure was reached and the reasons why the projected figure was not achieved. Is it down to lack of parent/pupil participation? Were there other factors that prevented the project achieving its projected figures or again was it simply that the projected figure was too ambitious?

**Young people-social and personal development (1J):**

The projected figure for 2001-2002 has apparently been exceeded so this appears to be a positive outcome. Looking at the bare figures alone is perhaps insufficient to allow us to provide a sound judgement. What standards or benchmarks have been used to determine levels of personal and social development?
**Mother and Toddler groups using QTP (NSO58):**

While the target was achieved in 2000-2001, it has dropped in 2001-2002 and has not achieved the projected figure of 6. Again we are not in a position to determine what the problem is here. Is it a case that a Toddler group has ceased operating or has the projected figure again been set too high?

**Bookstart packs distributed (NSO59):**

While the actual figures are all below the projected figures in all years, evidently Bookstart packs are being distributed in relatively large numbers. However, since the actual figures do not meet the projected figures, it is necessary to ask why these figures have not been achieved. What problems have been encountered and need to be addressed to improve distribution of Bookstart packs? May be it is a simple case of lowering the projected figures?

**Table 3: Quality Time Project Outputs 1999-2002**

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<tr>
<th></th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Quality Time Project

**Guidance sessions to parents (NSO61):**

Were there any problems with guidance sessions for parents? Did project workers find that not so many guidance sessions were required? guidance sessions for parents It is interesting to note that despite the forecast figures being consistently high and the actual figures being consistently much lower, the forecast figures for future years remain high. However, on a positive note, the actual numbers of guidance sessions to parents is steadily increasing.
Outreach sessions delivered (NSO62):

The projected figures for this particular objective were exceeded by the actual figures in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. However, the actual figures for 2001-2002 are below the projected figures. Evidently, there appears to be a lower requirement for outreach sessions in the latter years. This could be attributed to the fact that there may be less need for such work given that the project has become more established.

Bookstart Home Visits (NSO60):

Bookstart home visits appears to be similar in some respects to NSO70 below. The number of actual visits in 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 exceeded the projected figures. The exceptionally high ‘actual’ figures could be attributed to the fact that the work involved in a new project was under-estimated – a consideration to bear in mind when working on projected/forecast figures.

Families supported for attendance issues (NSO70)

It appears that the scale of this problem was underestimated to a certain extent. Clearly, family support for attendance issues needs to be re-evaluated in light of the actual figures in 2001-2002.

Overall, it appears that while in some cases projected figures have been overestimated and in some cases, underestimated, the ‘actual’ figures in most cases look relatively positive when compared with ‘projected’ figures. The tables and figures also reflect the positive fact that the Quality Time Project is a responsive and flexible project.

Ongoing Issues

Key issues emerging from the evaluation included:

♦ One of the main difficulties identified by QT Assistants was initiating and maintaining parental involvement. QTAs mentioned that in many cases bags were simply handed out to children to take home since parents simply arrived at schools to deliver and to collect their children. It seems that regardless of a number of approaches used by QT staff to encourage parental involvement, this continues to be a problem. However, it appears that QTA’s do react to the problem and employ a number of strategies to resolve these difficulties. Two schools appear to have stronger links with parents. One for example, hosts a QT parent group which meets weekly. The possible benefits are extending and developing relationships with parents, and encouraging greater parental involvement One could argue that encouraging any parent to spend time in a school is a positive outcome which contributes to a strategy of breaking down barriers.

♦ Practical issues are important. Quality Time staff identified some problems regarding storage, assembly and maintenance of QT materials. Retrieving QT bags from some parents appears to present problems in all schools. While this does not appear to be a major issue, there may be costs involved.
Restocking and replenishing the QT bags was viewed as time consuming and costly from the Head Teacher and QTA viewpoint. QT Staff highlighted costs incurred as a result of having to laminate and photocopy activity sheets. Damage to more expensive items such as books was also mentioned. One person told us:

“... a lot more money could be injected into it, in particular in new books. Once a book has been drawn in they don’t want to send it out again but it’s got to be because you haven’t got an unlimited amount of money that is a big problem I find in Nursery once things are destroyed its not always as nice.”

The ‘quality’ of materials is undoubtedly important in influencing and encouraging full participation:

“Because you give them quality stuff, you find that they (the parents) look after it more... rather than a thin paperback, if you get them a lovely cheerful book.”

Among the parents we spoke to, there was a considerable commitment from them to help with the re-stocking of bags with good quality stock made with good quality materials.

Some QTAs mentioned adapting the QT bags to match the needs and requirements of particular parents and their children. QTAs felt this to be an important part of their role given their awareness of the children and parents they regularly work or deal with. Clearly, parents with reading and writing difficulties will be in an awkward position when it comes to using the bags with their children. However, QTAs appear to be able to deal sensitively with parents who have difficulties with reading and writing. It is clear from the evaluation that QTAs are proactive in responding to the particular needs of parents and children. A QTA highlighted this point when she said:

“When we have a special needs review, we identify the children’s needs and then we will say to the QTA, this child needs experience at this, this, this and this. Are there any bags that will be suitable for that? So we can actually direct children into those bags. We don’t say that these particular bags are for 6 year old children, we’ll say that these particular bags are for the children who need it ... We might have a child who is perhaps really good at reading or they’ve got a real interest in something. We can point them in the direction of those bags.”

It is clear that Quality Time staff has learned from past experiences and continues to apply newly gained knowledge and experience to improving the Quality Time Project. This is ongoing throughout the project, and as evidenced by the following comment from a Head teacher:

“As long as you are willing to look at it, to constantly review what you are doing and to make your improvements.”
Sustainability

While there is a view that the Quality Time Project “must be absorbed into schools”, there is a general agreement among Head Teachers and Quality Time Assistants that the Quality Time Project can only be sustained if there is a continuation of funding. One person told us:

“It will probably stop, which is an awful thing to say because at the end of the day it’s a lot of work to be done. Hopefully the funding will come in, it needs to. But even the people doing the bags, you’re not going to have the equipment. Once it’s gone school can’t replace it. Where would the money come from to do that? It stopped before over [school name]. They used to have it and then that stopped because the funding ran out to pay the workers and to renew the stock."

“The support offered is high maintenance – the schools are heavily reliant on support from the team – this is a cause for concern in terms of sustainability”

The key issues for promoting a sustainable project beyond SRB appears to be down to funding and integration of the project (or certain aspects of it) into participating schools. In addition, given the geographical location of the project, there were suggestions that other initiatives or programmes could well incorporate the QT project into their own programme:

“This is an area that I worry about less because most of the activities in Quality Time are Sure Start activities...so we’re all ready doing them and it has been so well received.”

Much of the apparent success of Quality Time is quoted by stakeholders to be down to the enthusiasm and commitment of the QT staff. One particularly noteworthy element of the Project is that a good proportion of the key staff are both experienced parents and respected members of the local community. However, Because Quality Time is only one of many initiatives which relies on parental involvement, there maybe a danger of ‘meeting fatigue’. After all:

"There is only a finite number of residents, parents and partners who only have so much time to come along to so many different things."

However, despite the potential uncertainty of the future of the QT project, what became immediately obvious during our research was the more subtle (yet one could argue more important) benefits and long-term gains for those involved. Parents described how, using the bags, they had sat and worked and talked with their child for the first time. Additionally, older siblings and other family members were using the bags to work with the younger child. One parent described how her child could not speak before he used the bags, and another reported that her child could not draw a picture until they began working with the bags.
Conclusions and Recommendations

According to Quality Time staff on all levels, a project infrastructure is now in place and procedures and practices are in place, which is allowing the project to run smoothly. Clearly, project staff have learned a great deal over the initial set up period of the project and this experience and knowledge has been reviewed and modifications and adaptations have been applied. This is due in no small part to the body of experienced Nursery Nurses and Quality Time Assistants and a flexible management structure that is willing to learn and to adapt and change as the project develops.

The provision of innovative projects such as Quality Time is in line with the Government’s aims and objectives for improving levels of literacy. There is also a strong body of widely recognised research (Wells, 1997; Athey 1990; Pugh, De’Ath & Smith 1994) suggesting that parents and practitioners who work together can make an essential contribution to children’s education and lifelong emotional welfare. Indeed, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage suggests that:

- The past and future part played by parents in the education of their children is recognised and explicitly encouraged;
- That all parents are made to feel welcome, valued and necessary through a range of different opportunities for collaboration between children parents and practitioners;
- Relevant learning activities and play activities such as reading and sharing books, are continued at home.

(DfEE/QCA 2000:10)

Projects such as Quality time rely on good relationships between staff, children and parents. While the success of these is difficult to quantify, it is evident from the qualitative data collected that this has been a major contributing factor to the success of the project.

Another factor contributing to the success of the project is that workers and parents know and feel at ease with each other. Parents reported to us that it was good for them to "talk to adults" - both parents and teachers.

In order to address the concerns raised regarding continuity, we recommend that the manager’s role be covered on a full time basis. This was illustrated by one person who told us:

“You need someone full time to take queries and you need someone constantly going around to make sure its going right, to make sure they’re evaluating, to make sure they’re monitoring, to make sure what the take up is like, doing publicity and things like that. You can’t just chip in.”

For the two schools within the Sure Start area – we hope that Sure Start will pick up the Quality Time work. For the remaining four schools – that QT staff (preferably full time) work with key school personnel to explore possible future funding sources.
To continue to recruit and train local people as project workers

To maintain the excellent relationships and continue to share good practice.

“The QTP programme links well with a number of early years based projects across the city. It was used as a model for the early learning schemes that have been developed in three Sure Start areas and are planned for a further three.”
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