

## **PRINT MATTERS MORE**

A new research study commissioned by Egmont Publishing UK

In collaboration with Foyles Bookshops and Family, Kids & Youth

Print Matters More builds on the findings from Egmont's 2015 study, Print Matters. The aim of Print Matters was to understand why families prefer to read children's books in print and why children's eBook sales are so low when children are passionate about digital pastimes. The research revealed some very emotional reactions to printed books. Children love being read to. It makes them feel secure and happy. For parents, the shared reading experience prompted feelings of nostalgia and of being a good and loving parent. Print books were often treasured objects, very precious parts of family life, and imbued with significance and emotions.

This insight presented an opportunity: if decision-making is 85% emotional and 15% logical, could we harness the emotional aspect of reading in order to create new readers and book buyers? The hypothesis was:

***The deep emotional connection that reading with a child inspires can influence behaviour change and encourage more reading and more book buying***

We recruited 15 families with children aged 7-9 years old in Bristol, Birmingham and Stratford, London. The project ran from July 2016 until January 2017. All 15 families were reluctant with reading in some way. For example, parents disinclined to read to their children, parents who were time poor and rarely got involved with their children's reading, or children struggling to read or disengaged with it.

In order to test the hypothesis, the project was designed in two parts:

Part one was an intervention. Most parents know they ought to read to their children and often feel guilty about it. The project was not designed to add to the guilt, so we eschewed 'telling' parents how important it was that they read to their child and, rather, proposed a solution to the six-week summer holiday when many parents struggle to fill the time.

Families were given a £10 voucher every week for their child to spend on a new book from their local Foyles bookstore. The weekly visits were turned into more of an occasion by also giving them café vouchers. All parents agreed to read with their child for 20 minutes each day. At the end of the holiday, each family received £100 as a thank you for taking part. This approach created a shared reading routine for the families.

Families were interviewed at the beginning, middle and end of the summer holiday. They were also telephoned every week to see how they were getting on.

Part two of the project, after the school holiday ended, involved leaving the families to do as they wished without prompting or incentivising them. They were interviewed in October 2016 and January 2017. The aim was to see if the experience of reading and buying regularly over the summer would be enough to make behaviour change. Would the reading and buying habit carry on? Also, would the families notice any impact on academic progress once their children were back at school?

## **Intervention: the summer holiday**

### **Beginning of the summer**

The first interviews with the 15 families showed there were a variety of barriers to reading: children who were struggling; children who could read perfectly well but were disengaged; time-short parents; mums whose focus was more on younger children and mums busy with the demands of multiple children. There was reluctance to read and some outright negative feelings. A little anxiety was present too: some mums were worried about being able to find the time to read with their child and wondering what they had committed to. In all the families, reading with children was not prioritised or seen as pleasure.



### **Halfway through the summer**

Three weeks later, at the mid-point, the families took part in a focus group in their local Foyles store. The feedback was already very good. Mums were surprised at how much they were enjoying the project and, without exception, the children were relishing the experience. They enjoyed having their mum's attention and loved visiting Foyles. For some of the mums, there had been trepidation about going into a bookshop. It was not a familiar environment and they had expected it would be intimidating. But the in-store experience was very positive, warm and friendly and they quickly changed their minds.

### **End of the summer**

The families were interviewed in their homes and it was clear that the six-week intervention had had a major impact. Seeing their child's enthusiasm for choosing books and for being read to and their child's rapid progress had a profound impact on mums. They really appreciated spending the time with their child, sharing the experience, the treat at Foyles, and they felt the joy of being together - 'just to be with him', as one mum said.

*Lovely to have that routine of starting to cycle down once a week, choosing a book and having a cake and a drink*

Mum, Bristol

*We really enjoyed when we read the Tintin books together because we did the characters - and he did the voices and I did the voices*

Mum, Stratford London

The experience had a huge impact on the children, too. The project created opportunities for being physically close with their mums and having their focused attention during the reading sessions. This was enjoyed by all but especially appreciated by children with siblings. And real behaviour change was noticed, including switching to chapter books, reading independently, reading of their own volition and reading more.

*It was a luxury not having my baby brother there*

Boy, 8, Stratford, London

*There was a two-week period were all she did was read*

Mum, Bristol

### **The impact of choice**

Some parents had been in the habit of choosing books for their child but having £10 to spend that was not from their own bank account seemed to help them step back. It reduced the stakes, meaning it did not matter so much if the child made a poor choice (according to the parent's opinion), or if the child did not like the book. We saw parents beginning to relinquish control and the effect on the children's attitude and enjoyment was considerable. They loved being able to make their own choice.

*I liked that I could choose myself so I could get as many books as I want*

Girl, 8, Stratford, London

*If I have chosen it, I KNOW it's going to be good*

Boy, 8, Birmingham

### **Foyles**

It was clear that the Foyles experience had a really strong effect on the outcome of this project. By the end of the six-week intervention, families were really comfortable there. The huge choice, the environment, the café experience and the advice all combined to make the shopping trips a pleasurable treat. They said they appreciated being able to take their time; they felt very relaxed and at ease. The families all liked the children's book specialists and found them really helpful, knowledgeable and friendly. Several took their advice and bought what was recommended. One mum would even plan her trips around when the specialist was in because she liked having someone there who knew her! Most families topped up the £10 token each week so that they could buy more than one book.

*When I walked in first of all I was a bit like 'ooh this is overwhelming'... but that little corner where you see all of the picture books is a nice little cosy area where you can sit down and read*

Mum, Stratford, London

*They just left us to it, it didn't feel like we were doing a chore, it just felt nice, relaxed, it is relaxed in there, it's a really nice book shop actually*

Mum, Birmingham

## Post-intervention: the families on their own

### The families were left to their own devices

After the summer holidays the families were left on their own. Would the impact on the child's reading and on the parent-child relationship be enough to keep the reading routine going? Would they continue going into Foyles or, indeed, other bookshops? Would they continue buying books?

At October half term 2016 the families were interviewed: the reading routine was still going with 13 families. Seven families had already returned to Foyles. Mums said that they believed the focus on reading together had significantly increased their child's interest in reading. Some were still finding it hard to find time. A few were reading less often than during the holiday but still reading more than before the summer. And mums saw reading as much less of a chore, rather, they enjoyed the time with their children.

Those mums who had a tendency to control book choice were really letting go now as they noticed the positive effect that choosing their own books had had on their child's enjoyment and reading.

*Before, it would be me really choosing books for him but with him doing the book project it gave him the opportunity to choose what he really wanted. I think that's what he enjoyed the most*

Mum, Stratford, London

Many children had changed in attitude and behaviour. Typically, they showed more enjoyment, spent more time reading and read more often. They were also more confident and had more autonomy. For instance, four of the 15 children had taken their own books to school to read and had been allowed to read their own choice.

In all the families the children were really enjoying reading for pleasure and there was progress, too. The majority of parents felt their child had improved in ability and in confidence. The OECD says reading for pleasure is the single biggest indicator of a child's academic success and in line with this, parents also noted that since their children had returned to school, their maths, comprehension, spelling and vocabulary had improved. In fact, six children had spontaneous feedback from school to say how much improved they were. In one boy's schoolbook the teacher commented, 'Excellent reading, excellent reading', to his parents' delight.

## January 2017

It was now seven months since the project began. Eight families had returned to Foyles since the intervention ended. Eight mums bought children books as Christmas gifts and 12 of the children received books for Christmas. This was a change for the families: books had not featured so strongly as gifts for previous Christmases.

The children's reading was going strong: ten were reading independently more often than they did before the summer. 14 children had an improved reading level and greater confidence. They were proud of their achievements and had increased self-esteem.

**[How do you think your attitude to reading has changed?]**

***From one to ten?... Nine!***

Girl 8, Bristol

***The school has said that her reading is really good, they can tell she does a lot of reading at home!***

Mum, Birmingham

Finding time is a real challenge for parents and Christmas pushed some families out of their new reading routine. Nevertheless, 11 said they planned to carry on. Mums enjoyed the experience of reading, describing it as quality time. They noted that it was good to focus on one of their children alone. Seven mums felt that the project led to them having a shared interest with their child and, as a result, they had more engaged conversations. They felt more in-tune with their child's reading level and knowledge and felt deep pride in their child's achievements. They enjoyed observing their child's growing autonomy. All this created a greater motivation to carry on reading to their child. Mums talked of improved relationships with their children, whatever the start point. Even mums who said they already had a really good relationship with their child felt it was enhanced.

***I knew how much I love to read with him, I knew how much, but you guys kind of forced my hand to do it more, in a lovely way. It made me realise how important it is and to do it more... even if it's 10 minutes, it's 10 minutes***

Mum to boy, 8, Stratford, London

***I think that we're both more eager to find time to read together, just the two of us, which wasn't something that we actively did before***

Mum to girl 8, Bristol

## Summary

Print Matters More had a lasting effect on our 15 families:

1. It had a profound impact on relationships between parent and child. It is clear that spending quality time reading together created a deep emotional connection.
2. Being read to had a powerful influence on the children's own reading. Independent reading flourishes alongside being read to and the children made fast progress in their own reading *and* progress at school.

3. Having free choice of what they read was transformational in the attitude of the children to reading. Agency leads to commitment.
4. The experience of a family friendly bookshop with knowledgeable staff and a broad range made this diverse range of families feel that Foyles was for them and a place they would return to. The welcoming environment and going to the café made the visit a real treat and turned it into a special outing.

So, to return to the hypothesis: *The deep emotional connection that reading with a child inspires can influence behaviour change and encourage more reading and more book buying.* Yes, it can. As a result of our intervention, there was more reading and more book buying and encouraging signs of a lasting habit that will give these 15 children the best chance of achieving their potential.

***I've been making a point of reading to him more because the project taught me that it's important to make time for him. We have had some very special moments together since taking part. I enjoy that it's something just for me and him. We still go to Foyles and have a treat***  
Mum, Stratford, London

*'Egmont's Print Matters More research is really important. In depth research with real families with children struggling to read. The impact of the intervention not just on the reading but on the quality of family relationships is moving and inspirational. This made a genuine lasting difference to these families and developed a book buying habit too. There is much that policy makers concerned with reading and literacy should learn from this.'*

Joy Court

Chair: CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Medals  
Reviews Editor: The School Librarian Journal

*"We were thrilled to take part in the Print Matters More project, and the results were revelatory and inspiring to say the least. Those of us who work in books take for granted the fact that reading enriches lives, but it's been immensely powerful to witness that process in action and to see on an individual level how creating a regular reading habit is so beneficial in so many ways for children and parents alike. The research has already influenced our activity in a variety of ways, from how we lay out our shops, to the marketing materials we create, to how we train our booksellers to sell children's books. It would be lovely to see the wider book trade embrace these findings and work to amplify the powerful message they embody to the millions of would-be avid readers out there."*

Simon Heafield

Head of Marketing & Brand, Foyles