Research Report: Evaluation of Family Links Transforming Learning Workshops, delivered as part of Initial Teacher Education at Oxford Brookes University

Report Summary

This report outlines the findings from an evaluation of the Family Links Transforming Learning Workshops, delivered as part of Initial Teacher Education at Oxford Brookes University. The Transforming Learning Workshops developed from the Family Links Nurturing Schools Programme, which aims to increase the emotional intelligence and relationships skills of children through four key constructs: increased self-awareness, maintaining appropriate expectations, increased empathy and positive discipline.

27 PGCE students from Oxford Brookes University, recruited on the basis of lower performance on the first of three required school placements, completed the Transforming Learning Workshops at three points throughout the academic year. Two of the three sessions were three-hour workshops, and the final session ran for a full day. A mixed measures design was used, assessing participants at the beginning and end of the workshops using the Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire (Grant, 2012; developed for Family Links), alongside focus groups at the end of the intervention to allow deeper exploration of trainee teachers' perceptions.

Results show that following the Transforming Learning Workshops, self-reported teacher efficacy increased in all four key areas: learning environment, praise and reward, behaviour management and personal power, with the greatest increase in learning environment. Changes in teacher efficacy scores were not affected by age, gender or previous experience within education. Findings from the focus groups indicate that teacher trainees had very positive experiences of the workshops. They felt their confidence had improved due to the range of strategies taught, and indicated that praise had been particularly useful for managing behaviour. Participants stated that they felt they would have benefitted from more time to reflect and discuss their experiences. They also identified that their experiences of putting the strategies into practice was dependent on the schools where they were undertaking their placements.

Family Links are very grateful to the team at Oxford Brookes University for their support with this evaluation, and to all the trainee teachers who have participated.

Introduction

Teacher self-efficacy impacts on both teacher and student outcomes, with research demonstrating that it predicts teacher goals, attitudes and aspirations (Dicke et al, 2014; Brouwers and Tomic, 2000; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002); student motivation (Moore & Esselman, 1992; Ross, 1992); and students' own self-efficacy and attitudes (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Cheung & Cheng, 1997). Low self-efficacy in teachers can have damaging effects in the classroom, reducing student academic outcomes and impacting on teacher wellbeing and retention (Klassen et al, 2011). However, findings show that trainee teachers' self-efficacy can be improved through Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses (Sharma et al, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007).

Although there are some variations in the definition of teacher self-efficacy, the definition used in this report is: *"a teacher's judgement of their capability to bring about a desired outcome in their own and a student's environment, behaviour and emotions, even among those who may be difficult or unmotivated."* (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Woodfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 783).

Family Links Transforming Learning Workshops

Family Links is a national charity providing workshops to parents and teachers.

The underlying aim of the Transforming Learning Workshops (TLW) with trainee teachers is to:

- Improve and increase the range of positive discipline strategies that trainees have at their disposal.
- Provide practical suggestions for building and maintaining a nurturing and emotionally safe classroom climate.
- Support trainees in developing excellent interpersonal skills to empower their work with colleagues and parents.
- Highlight the benefits and practices of nurturing themselves as teachers.

These aims link directly to The Department for Education Teacher Standards, in particular Standards 1, 4, 5 and 7. A growing body of evidence suggests that teachers who have experienced Family Links training are more confident in many aspects of their practice – including dealing with challenging behaviour; the appropriate use of praise, rewards and sanctions; and providing meaningful and constructive feedback to pupils.

TLW were run with a targeted group of PGCE students at Oxford Brookes University (OBU), selected on the basis of lower performance on reports after the first of three required school placements. Workshops were held at three points throughout the academic year, during the

Spring and Summer terms. Two of the three sessions were three-hour workshops, and the final session ran for a full day. In addition to the three workshops, Family Links also delivered two 2-hour conference style presentations to the whole PGCE cohort, one at the beginning of the year and one shortly after the Easter holidays. These whole group sessions focused on both practical strategies to use in the classroom and underlying theory, and gave trainee teachers space to reflect on their experiences to date.

Changes in teacher self-efficacy relating to four key areas (creating a positive learning environment, praise and positivity, behaviour management and personal power) were assessed via pre and post questionnaires, completed before and after the TLW. Focus groups were also run with participants at the end of the workshops to provide a more in-depth exploration of their perceptions and experiences.

Method

Participants

44 PGCE students at Oxford Brookes University (OBU) were recruited to take part in the TLW, selected on the basis of lower performance on reports after the first of three required school placements. Out of these 44, 27 students (22 females and 5 males) fully completed the workshops by attending all sessions at the three points during the academic year, and it is only these participants who are included in this analysis.

Included participants have a mean age of 30.78 years. Prior to commencing their teaching training at OBU, their mean experience in education was 1.19 years, with mean experience working as a Teaching Assistant 0.89 years.

Table 1: Key demographic information of participants

	N	%
Age (years)		
20-29	16	59
30-39	6	22
40-49	4	15
50-59	1	4
Gender		
Male	5	18
Female	22	82
Previous Experience		
0	9	33
1	6	22
2	3	11
3	3	11
4	3	11
5	2	7
6	0	0
7	0	0
8	0	0
9	0	0
10	0	0
11	0	0
12	0	0
13	1	4

Evaluation design and data collection methods

A mixed methods design was used, assessing participants through both quantitative self-reports and qualitative focus groups.

Participants completed pre and post Teacher Efficacy Questionnaires (TEQ) before starting and after finishing the TLW. Additionally, Transforming Learning Workshop Evaluations (TWLE) were completed at the end of each workshop, asking participants to evaluate how useful they had found the session, with an extended evaluation after the final workshop reflecting back on all three of the sessions. Finally, focus groups were conducted following the final workshop to allow a deeper exploration of perceptions and experiences.

Measures

Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire (TEQ)

The TEQ (Grant, 2012; developed for Family Links) consists of 16 items relating to teacher efficacy, with four items relating to each of the following four areas: Creating a learning environment, praise and positivity, behaviour management and personal power. Participants rated their current self-efficacy for each of the items using a 5 –point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). The questionnaire has a maximum score of 80 points, with each area accounting for 20 points. Higher scores indicate a higher level of self-reported teacher efficacy.

Transforming Learning Workshop Evaluation (TLWE)

The TLWEs were completed at the end of each workshop, and consisted of both scale-based and open questions collecting feedback about how useful participants found the sessions. The final workshop evaluation required participants to rate seven statements using a 5 point Likert scale, relating to the extent to which they agreed with how the TLWs had improved their practice.

Focus group Semi-structured Interviews

Three semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with teacher trainees at the end of all workshops, to allow a deeper exploration of their experiences. Each group had a facilitator, who would ask follow-up prompts to further discussion, and an observer, who kept note of any important non-verbal behaviour which would not be picked up on the recording, as well as any key patterns in participation, for example, dominating, interrupting others or non-participation in discussion. The focus groups were built around five key questions. This included deeper exploration of the four constructs from the TEQ (creating a supportive learning environment, praise and positivity, behaviour management and personal power) and following up a key finding from the questionnaire, exploring why participants felt their confidence with responding to challenging behaviour had increased. Participants were also

asked to discuss whether their hopes for the workshops had been met, and their experiences of putting the strategies taught during the workshops into practice within the classroom.

Data Analysis

A dependent samples t-test was used to compare the total mean TEQ scores before and after the TLW. The TEQ scores obtained before and after the TLW were then separated into the four constructs and analysed using a dependent samples t-test.

Further analysis was undertaken to investigate how age, gender and previous experience in education impacted on TEQ score change. Pearson's Product Moment correlations were undertaken for age and amount of prior experience, along with repeated measures ANOVAs examining the factors of age, gender and previous experience in relation to change in teacher efficacy.

Qualitative data obtained from the focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis, identifying the key themes from participants' experiences and the number of participants in agreement.

Results

Change in Teacher Efficacy

Overall change in Teacher Efficacy

TEQ scores obtained before and after the TLW were analysed using a dependent samples t-test. Scores obtained after the TLW (M = 68.70, SD = 5.66) were significantly higher than those that were obtained before the TLW (M = 55.67, SD = 4.07) (t (26) = -10.973, $p < 0.01$). A repeated measures ANOVA was also undertaken to examine the impact of previous experience on change in teacher self-efficacy. A main effect for the TLW on TEQ score (F, (1,26)=120.403, $p < 0.001$), corroborating findings from the t-test This indicates that participants had a higher teacher self-efficacy after completing the LTW. However, although this finding is significant, these results cannot conclusively be attributed to the TLW due to the presence of other unknown variables.

Individual Constructs

TEQ scores obtained before and after the TLW were then broken down into the four separate constructs and analysed using a dependent samples t-test. There was a significant difference between pre and post scores for all four constructs, with the largest difference in Learning Environment and the smallest in Praise and Reward.

Construct	Pre TLW TEQ Score	Post TLW TEQ Score	t score and significance level

Learning Environment	M = 15.07, SD = 1.47	M = 18.30, SD = 1.38	t (26) = -9.503 p < 0.01
Behaviour	M = 13.11, SD = 1.867	M = 16.81, SD = 2.00	t (26) = -7.816, p < 0.01
Personal Power	M = 12.81, SD = 1.80	M = 16.07, SD = 1.86	t (26) = -6.977, p < 0.01
Praise and Reward	M = 14.67, SD = 1.59	M = 17.52, SD = 1.70	t (26) = -6.592 p < 0.01

Table 2: Mean pre and post TEQ scores, t scores and significance level for each of the four constructs

Figure 1: Graph showing the mean TEQ score change for each construct
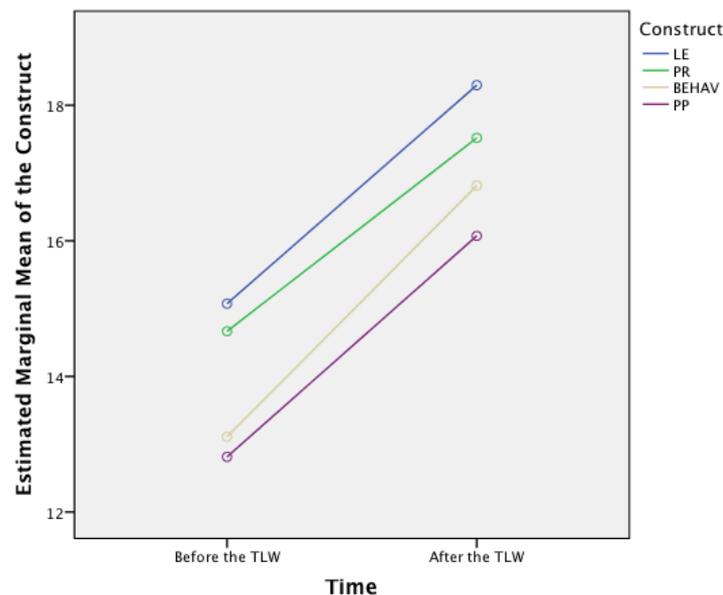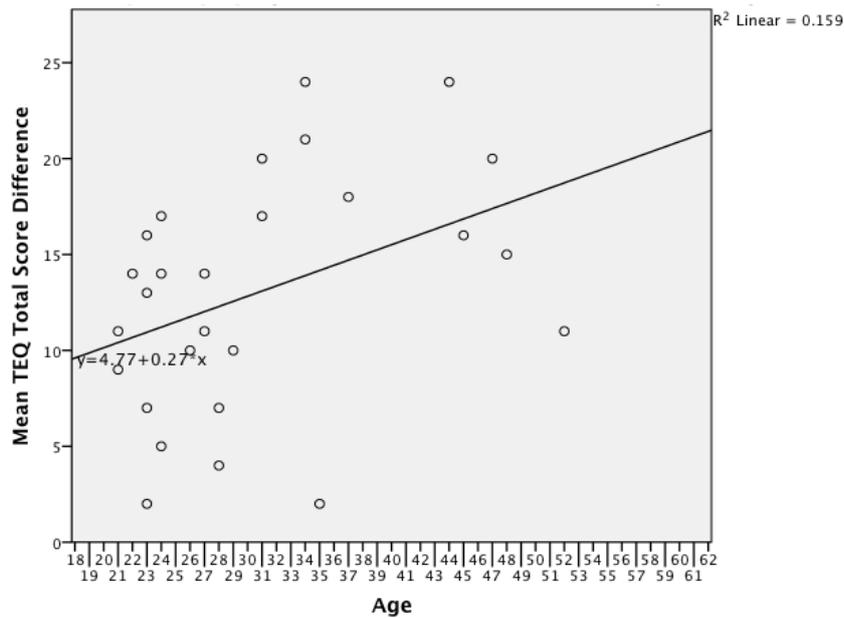

Factors relating to changes in Teacher Efficacy

Age and Change in Teacher Efficacy

Pearson's Product Moment revealed that there was a significant, strong, positive correlation between the age of the trainee and the increase in reported teacher self-efficacy, which accounted for 94% of the variance, $r(27) = -0.399$, $p < 0.05$. This suggests that as the age of the participant increased, there was a greater change in TEQ score. However, the repeated measures ANOVA revealed that age was not significantly related to change in TEQ score ($F (1,26) = 8.654$, *ns*.) However, this did approach significance and may be due to the small sample size which may have affected the standard deviation and error.

Figure 2: Graph showing the correlation between Age and Mean TEQ Score Difference

R² Linear = 0.159

$y = 4.77 + 0.27 \cdot x$

*Previous Experience and Change in Teacher Efficacy*

Pearson's Product Moment revealed that there no correlation between the prior experience of the trainee and the change in TEQ score (r (27) = 0.347, *ns*.). Similarly, the repeated measures ANOVA revealed that prior experience was not significantly related to change in TEQ score (F (1,26) = 4.342, ns). This suggests that change in self-efficacy was not related to trainees' prior experience.

Figure 3: Graph showing the mean TEQ Scores before and after the TLW for trainee teachers with and without prior experience

Gender and *in Teacher*

Change *Efficacy*
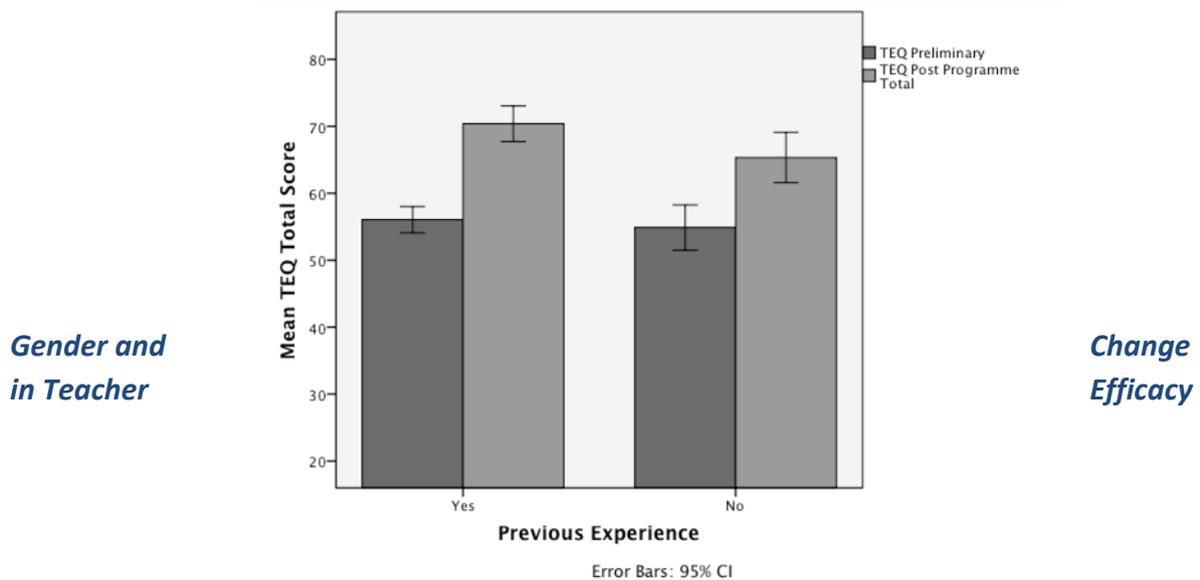
The repeated measures ANOVA revealed that gender was not significantly related to change in TEQ score (F (1,26) = 5.966, *ns)*.

Figure 4: Graph showing the mean TEQ Scores before and after the TLW for Males and Females
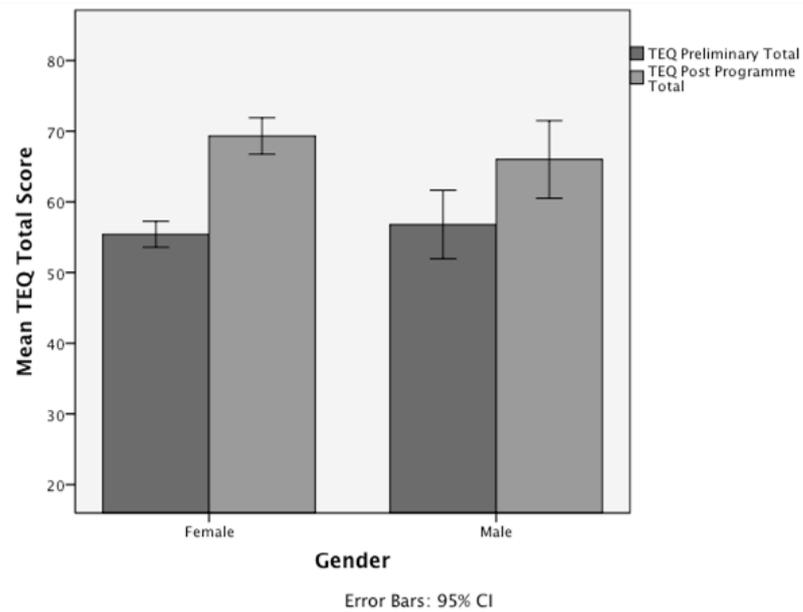
Transforming Learning Workshop Evaluations

In the final evaluation, reflecting back on all the TLWs, all participants either agreed completely or somewhat agreed with the seven statements relating to how the TLWs had improved their practice.

Table 3: Feedback from Transforming Learning Workshop Evaluation

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree
… support the emotional needs of pupils	89%	11%	0%	0%
… manage challenging behaviour	68%	32%	0%	0%
… effectively use praise and rewards	86%	14%	0%	0%
… think about working more effectively with other adults, including parents	96%	4%	0%	0%
… create a positive learning environment for pupils	79%	21%	0%	0%
… support my own emotional health and wellbeing	75%	25%	0%	0%
… better understand the connections between emotional health and learning	82%	18%	0%	0%

Focus Group Semi-Structured Interviews

Overall, trainee teachers were very positive about the transforming learning workshops. They felt their teaching confidence had improved due to the workshops equipping them with a range of positive behaviour management strategies, and developing their understanding of the underlying reasons for children's behaviour. They felt that putting these strategies into practice in their classroom practice decreased the incidences of challenging behaviour that they experienced, as well as giving them tools for responding to challenging behaviour when it did occur. However, even though many students commented on how useful they had found the strategies taught throughout the workshops, especially around positive praise, a few students felt that some of the strategies were not appropriate for the class or situation they found themselves in.

A deeper exploration of the four constructs from the TEQ showed the following:

Learning environment

Several teacher trainees spoke highly of how the workshops had encouraged positive learning environments within their classrooms: *"It told us what we can do to make a fair class environment with the children feeling more praised."*

They felt that with the knowledge gained, they could now create a caring environment, which encouraged children to learn and was consistently positive, with one participant responding that: *"You feel the environment's much more relaxed now, and you're being fair to all the*

children." However, trainees were also aware that they weren't positive all of the time, commenting on how it is hard to always be positive.

Praise and Positivity

Praise and positivity was a key theme throughout the focus groups, with 12 trainees commenting on how it had been a useful insight into managing behaviour. One trainee stated: *"Praise is probably one of the simplest things that you can do, to have a really powerful effect."* Another responded that they now *"always go in and highlight something that someone's doing good at the start of each morning."* Trainees had also found it useful to think about the type of praise they used, and made sure they now used *"praise for putting effort in, rather than the actual outcome."*

Behaviour

Trainee teachers found the positive behaviour management aspects of the workshops useful, particularly as they felt they had received limited input on this from their core lectures. Feeling more confident with managing behaviour had impacted on other aspects of teaching, as well as pupil learning, with one trainee commenting: *"behaviour comes into everything you do as a teacher"*. The workshops had given trainees a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons for children's behaviour, and this helped them to respond to it. One trainee stated: *"being able to know that behaviour comes from a feeling rather than just children"* had been a particularly useful learning point from the workshops. All of the focus groups commented on the amount and range of strategies that had been discussed.

Personal Power

Personal power was something many trainees mentioned throughout the interviews: *"It's Personal Power for me, because…I hadn't really heard as much about that before, so I found it useful"*. This was useful in relation to both the children and to themselves as trainee teachers. Trainee teachers found that equipping children with choices, and sitting down and talking about how other people may feel due to their behaviour, was a very powerful tool. Additionally, many trainees agreed that the workshops had made them feel empowered as teachers. This empowerment and self-esteem appeared to increase when students were left alone with a class and allowed to implement their own ideas, something that bodes well for their future careers. Quotes from trainee teachers include: *"that just gave me the confidence to think 'ok, you deal with it that way, I'm not going to do that, and I'm going to follow what I think is right"* and *"I think personally, it's helped me have self –belief, you know, a bit more confidence in my own actions useful with the children to sort of say."*

Other themes and further development

Due to the reflective style of the workshops, trainees also found it useful gain perspective and insights from other trainee teachers. Although they appreciated time to reflect on past

experiences, many felt there could have been more time allotted to this section of the course, especially since the process was so useful.

The training highlighted to many trainees the importance of looking after themselves, not only as a teacher but also as a parent and/or a student. Some commented how they could notice a difference between themselves compared to those who did not partake in the training, because they were now making sure they were having enough rest and sleep.

Nearly everyone within the focus groups mentioned that their experiences of implementing the strategies was dependent on the schools where they undertook their placements. Some students found they were placed in schools where the strategies were not necessary, while others found they were not able to implement the strategies if the school had a very detailed and rigid policy already in place. However, when trainees were allowed to implement their own strategies, they reported feeling a sense of personal empowerment and felt their self-esteem increase.

Finally, some student thought it may be useful to consider revising the timing of the training. Several students felt it would be better to run full day training rather than half day training, while others commented around the time of year training is carried out. Some student felt that the training would be more beneficial if it took place during the time they were on placement within a school as then they would then be able to put techniques straight into practice and have children in mind throughout the training.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from this evaluation show that there were significant improvements in self-reported teacher efficacy following completion of the Transforming Learning Workshops. This was not affected by age, gender or previous experience within education. Trainee teachers' efficacy improved across all four areas: learning environment, praise and rewards, behaviour management and personal power, with the greatest improvements in learning environment.

Although there was a significant improvement in teacher efficacy following the workshops, this effect cannot be conclusively attributed to the workshops. The use of a pre-post evaluation design examining changes within participants means that other developmental factors may be contributing, for example, increased efficacy over time as a result of increased classroom experience. Further evaluation using comparisons with a control group would strengthen the robustness of the evaluation and allow more definitive conclusions to be drawn.

Findings from the focus group indicate that teacher trainees had very positive experiences of the workshops. They felt their confidence had improved due to the range of strategies taught, and indicated that praise had been particularly useful for managing behaviour. Participants stated that they felt they would have benefitted from more time to reflect and discuss their experiences. They also identified that their experiences of putting the strategies into practice was very dependent on the schools where they were placed.

Future study could investigate the longitudinal impact of the TLWs throughout teaching, for example, conducting follow-up evaluations when participants have qualified and are responsible for setting up routines within their own classroom. Additionally, self-report questionnaires only capture a limited window of information from participants, both in terms of quantity and depth. A possible way to further investigate would be to administer a self-report diary alongside self-report questionnaires. This would provide a richer insight into participants' thoughts and actions.

Overall, these findings highlight the impact that interventions as part of ITE can have on improving the self-efficacy of trainee teachers, and provide evidence of the positive impact of TLWs in improving trainee teacher outcomes.

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