



Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom Case Studies



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Introduction

1.1 What is SSLiC?

Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom (SSLiC) is a knowledge exchange programme that ultimately aims to improve communication and learning outcomes for all children. It seeks to achieve this aim by providing a forum for knowledge exchange between practitioners and researchers. There is a wealth of research in the area of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), although there are still gaps in our understanding of how to apply this in practice in schools and the best ways to support school practitioners to embed communication in their school's policy and practice. If we as practitioners and researchers wish to see greater improvements in outcomes for all children starting in school and beyond, it is critical that we come together, over a sustained period of time, to investigate how the evidence base related to communication and oral language that does exist might be applied to a particular setting and then how this collective knowledge might be used to inform the wider community of 'what works' in schools for children. To support this process the SSLiC programme has identified five evidence-informed domains around which schools can focus professional development and learning:

- Language Leadership
- Staff Professional Development and Learning

- Communication Supporting Classrooms
- Identifying and Supporting Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- Working with Others.

This report describes the activities, outcomes and learning from 9 schools across London and the south east who participated in the SSLiC programme across the 2017-18 academic year. Five schools were engaged in the programme across an academic year and four schools for two terms. Each school had access to research findings, a school self-assessment audit tool, an evidence-based classroom observation tool and received regular support from facilitators with research and school practitioner backgrounds. All participants had the opportunity to share and evaluate their findings at the end of the year, the results of which have been published as case studies in this report.

1.2 Raising attainment for children with language difficulties

Raising attainment for all children is at the heart of education and research has shown how language difficulties may be correlated with future academic performance.¹ When considering academic attainment, research literature has pointed to children with language difficulties attaining less well in national tests than their typically developing peers (TDP), both at the end of Key Stage

¹ Snowling, M. J., Hulme, C., Bailey, A. M., Stothard, S. E., & Lindsay, G. (2011). Better Communication Research Project: language and literacy attainment of pupils during early years and through KS2: does teacher assessment at five provide a valid measure of children's current and future educational attainments?

2² and end of Key Stage 4.^{3,4} Moreover, research into skills which are arguably necessary for classroom learning has shown some of the difficulties children with SCLN may have in acquiring those skills. Children with language difficulties, for example, have been shown to have difficulties with acquiring literacy skills,⁵ writing difficulties,⁶ difficulties with numeracy,⁷ working memory⁸ and executive functioning skills.⁹ Moreover, we know that there is a relationship between language difficulties and problems with behaviour, and the difficulties that children with SCLN experience with their social and emotional skills.^{10,11,12} This is pertinent as research suggests that attainment is linked to positive social and emotional wellbeing.¹³

The relationship between language and attainment is a complex one. SSLiC aims to foster a good language learning environment, and so provide support for literacy, support for learning and ultimately

promote positive academic outcomes. Further, creating effective language learning school environments can prepare children for the more challenging demands placed on oral language as they proceed through school, and can reduce the number of children experiencing SCLN.



- 2 Conti-Ramsden, G., Botting, N., Knox, E., & Simkin, Z. (2002). Different school placements following language unit attendance: Which factors affect language outcome? *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 37(2), 185-195.
- 3 Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., & Pallikara, O. (2011). Explaining the academic achievement at school leaving for pupils with a history of language impairment: Previous academic achievement and literacy skills. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 223-237.
- 4 Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational context, student satisfaction, and post-compulsory progress. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 44(1), 36-55.
- 5 Stothard, S. E., Snowling, M. J., Bishop, D., Chipchase, B. B., & Kaplan, C. A. (1998). Language-Impaired Preschoolers: A Follow-Up Into Adolescence. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 41(2), 407-418.
- 6 Dockrell, J., Ricketts, J., Charman, T., & Lindsay, G. (2014). Exploring writing products in students with language impairments and autism spectrum disorders. *Learning and Instruction*, 32, 81-90.
- 7 Harrison, L. J., McLeod, S., Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2009). Literacy, numeracy, and learning in school-aged children identified as having speech and language impairment in early childhood. *International Journal of Speech and Language Pathology*, 11(5), 392-403.
- 8 Baddeley, A. (2003). Working memory and language: An overview. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 36(3), 189-208.
- 9 Henry, L. A., Messer, D. J., & Nash, G. (2012). Executive functioning in children with specific language impairment. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53(1), 37-45.
- 10 Bakopoulou, I., & Dockrell, J. E. (2016). The role of social cognition and prosocial behaviour in relation to the socio-emotional functioning of primary aged children with specific language impairment. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 49, 354-370.
- 11 Yew, S. G. K., & O'Kearney, R. (2013). Emotional and behavioural outcomes later in childhood and adolescence for children with specific language impairments: meta-analyses of controlled prospective studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(5), 516-524.
- 12 Conti-Ramsden, G., & Botting, N. (2008). Emotional health in adolescents with and without a history of specific language impairment (SLI). *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 49(5), 516-525.
- 13 Gutman, L. M., & Vorhaus, J. (2012). *The impact of pupil behaviour and wellbeing on educational outcomes*. Department for Education, London.

Case studies

Chisenhale Primary School:

Increasing Opportunities for Quality Spoken Interactions across the School

Research Team and Setting

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Dr Joanna Vivash, SSLiC Facilitator, UCL Centre for Inclusive Education

Background

Chisenhale is a 1 ½ form entry community primary school based in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The school also has a nursery for children from 3 years old. The school serves a diverse community and there is a mixed social and economic demographic.

A key priority within the school's improvement plan was the development of children's speech, language and communication needs. Previously, the school had completed a number of key pieces of work around supporting English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Sarah and Margaux wished to build on these foundations to support all children's language skills, with the overall aim of developing children's literacy and thinking

skills. For example, many thinking skills are mediated by language and it is suggested that interventions developing language skills are likely to enrich children's cognitive development. Additionally, extensive research has shown that oral language skills are fundamental to the development of literacy skills, and oral language skills at 3½ influence word-reading levels at 5½ and reading comprehension skills at 8½.¹⁴ Furthermore, it has been shown that interventions in the early years with a focus on oral language have had additional positive impacts on reading comprehension skills.¹⁵

Along with a school improvement priority on developing language skills, there was a specific target on focusing on the quality of children's writing. Given the emerging research into the relationship between oral language skills and writing, with reported difficulties in the emergent writing skills¹⁶ and text generation¹⁷ for children with language difficulties, a further hope for the project was that through developing children's spoken language in the classroom, gains would be seen in the quality of children's writing.

14 Hulme, C., Nash, H. M., Gooch, D., Lervåg, A., & Snowling, M. J. (2015). The foundations of literacy development in children at familial risk of dyslexia. *Psychological science*, 26(12), 1877-1886.

15 Fricke, S., Bowyer-Crane, C., Haley, A. J., Hulme, C., & Snowling, M. J. (2013). Efficacy of language intervention in the early years. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(3), 280-290.

16 Puranik, C. S., & Lonigan, C. J. (2012). Early writing deficits in preschoolers with oral language difficulties. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 45(2), 179-190.

17 Dockrell, J. E., Ricketts, J., Charman, T., & Lindsay, G. (2014). Exploring writing products in students with language impairments and autism spectrum disorders. *Learning and Instruction*, 32, 81-90.

Analysis from the initial SSLiC Self-Assessment Audit identified that the school had a number of well-developed practices and results from the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT) identified many strengths in the Communication Supporting Classroom Domain. For example, the CSCOT identified that within the Language Learning Environment, there were some well-developed role play areas in the Foundation Stage classrooms. However, Sarah and Margaux were curious to explore how these areas could be utilised as a means of supporting talk. Role play is an important component of a language rich environment¹⁸ and research has highlighted the relationship between play and language development and there is evidence to suggest that directed and guided play can successfully be used to deepen children's understanding of new words.¹⁹

Further, there were a number of items within the Communication Supporting Classroom domain which showed areas for development. In particular, Sarah and Margaux noted that there were few observed instances of opportunities for children and adults to talk with each other, and when talk did take place, improvements in the quality of the talk could be made. Research suggests that a key theoretical underpinning of language acquisition is the role that socially meaningful interactions play in supporting early language development, and that adults in schools have a key role in scaffolding classroom interactions.²⁰ Further, research has shown that the ways adults talk with children can enhance children's

expressive and receptive language skills.²¹ For example, interactions which include modelling of target words, expanding the utterance, and recasting are thought to lead to faster language acquisition²² and competence in the use of strategies such as extending, labelling and scripting are fundamental to providing high quality verbal input. However, it is also recognised that these techniques are often used less frequently in classrooms than would be hoped.²³

With this in mind, Sarah and Margaux developed a whole-school action plan to provide greater opportunities for high quality spoken interactions between children and their teachers, and peers, in order to enhance all children's language skills which would in turn support literacy skills.

What was done?

At the heart of this project was the desire to implement whole-school change and there was a clear process planned in order to lay strong foundations for the change. Sarah and Margaux identified the strengths within the school system, particularly how the school's climate was conducive to supporting change. In order to support change across the school, a Communication Team spanning the different phases, including the Early Years, was established and led by Sarah and Margaux, through which a number of actions were carried out.

Increasing opportunities within the classroom for spoken interactions

Firstly, the team worked collaboratively to introduce Talking Time – opportunities within

18 Justice, L. M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(2), 36-44.

19 Weisberg, D. S., Zosh, J. M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013). Talking it up: Play, language development, and the role of adult support. *American Journal of Play*, 6(1), 39-54.

20 Law, J., Charlton, J., Dockrell, J., Gascoigne, M., McKean, C., & Theakston, A. (2017). Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantage backgrounds. *Institute of Education*, London.

21 Dickinson, D. K., Hofer, K. G., Barnes, E. M., & Grifenhagen, J. F. (2014). Examining teachers' language in Head Start classrooms from a Systemic Linguistics Approach. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(3), 231-244.

22 Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 41(1), 33-54.

23 Girolametto, L., Weitzman, E., & Greenberg, J. (2003). Training day care staff to facilitate children's language. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 12(3), 299-311.

the classroom when the expectation was on promoting talk between students and staff, and where adults can scaffold and extend children's spoken interactions. A symbol reinforcing Talking Time was introduced and provided a visual representation, and reminder, of the opportunity to speak.

Developing interactions to extend children's language

Alongside providing additional opportunities for spoken interactions, the quality of the interactions was developed to promote and extend children's language. This was achieved through the professional development of staff alongside developing the classroom environment and providing additional resources for children to use.

To support staff in developing and extending their spoken interactions, Sarah and Margaux firstly worked together, along with their class teams, to develop their own practice and identify strategies for enhancing the quality of their talk with children. They utilised the Language Learning Interaction section of the CSCOT to observe and monitor their interactions and adapted this to focus more succinctly on the items related to extending talk. The strategies which Sarah and Margaux had identified as being effective within their classrooms were then cascaded to other staff members through staff meetings. In order to support staff with the implementation of these strategies, working in pairs, staff used the adapted CSCOT to observe and support each other's practice.

To develop the classroom environment to further promote opportunities for interactions and to support children with resources to encourage talk, a range of approaches and strategies were implemented across the school. This included the introduction of key vocabulary across the school and the use of working walls to encourage talk and reinforce the key vocabulary. Additionally, key questions within book

corners were included to promote talk when looking at books and all staff encouraged the use of sentence stems to support writing. The use of sentence stems was further developed through exploring cross curricular sentence stems, for example within maths. Furthermore, within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 classrooms, newly established role play areas have been developed with a key focus of encouraging and promoting spoken interactions and were designed to include support with key vocabulary and story ideas.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The main outcome of the project is the successful implementation of increased opportunities for high quality spoken interactions which has occurred across the whole school and become embedded within teacher practice. Whilst it may appear a simple idea, the introduction of the Talking Time symbol placed a focus on interactions with others whereby there was an expectation of talk, opportunities for the talk to be extended and an awareness from the children that they would be given support with their talk. There is evidence within teachers' planning that there are now structured opportunities for talk within all lessons and there is a greater staff awareness of the importance of structuring talk time along with greater awareness of strategies to scaffold and extend the talk. Further, not only do children have more opportunities to talk, the enhanced language rich learning environment and additional resources within the classroom has resulted in children having concrete tools they can use, and they know how these tools can be used to support their talk.

Importantly, these changes have begun to impact on children's overall language and literacy skills. Whilst the measuring of this impact is on-going, there is emerging

evidence from the project that children are using more varied language when interacting with adults and peers, and improvements are beginning to be seen in children's written work, particularly with their spelling and the structure and quality of the writing.

Moving forward, Sarah and Margaux have begun planning ways to sustain this change and to extend the focus into children's unstructured time. For example, plans are in place to enhance the outdoor space to include areas to encourage talk, and to support Midday Supervisors with extending children's talk.

Key Learning

The project has demonstrated how whole-school change which focusses on children's language can positively influence children's spoken interactions and can lead to gains in literacy skills.

A large amount of work was undertaken as part of this project, to identify where there were opportunities for change and to plan

and implement such change. The challenge, however, is how to best capture this in order to inform others' practice and how to make use of and contribute to the existing evidence base. For example, whilst there are well-established links between oral language skills and reading, the project has provided some indicative evidence to support the claim that supporting oral language skills will support written skills. Currently within the research literature, there is less evidence to drawn upon as to how oral language skills may influence writing, as often the links between these may vary according to a child's development phase and their reading skills.²⁴ However, it is believed that through the process of knowledge exchange, this evidence may be used to inform further research exploring the links between oral language and writing, and to strengthen the theoretical connections between adult interactions and language development in children. A challenge exists for both practitioners and researchers, however, as to how to apply and embed this approach as typical classroom practice.



²⁴ Dockrell, J., Marshall, C., & Wyse, D. (2015). *Talk for writing: Evaluation report and executive Summary*. Education Endowment Foundation.

Crown Lane Primary School and Children's Centre:

*Working collaboratively with parents to promote
knowledge and understanding of language*

Research Team and Setting

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Background

Situated in Streatham, within the London Borough of Lambeth, Crown Lane Primary School is a large, two form entry, Primary School, providing provision from Nursery through to Year 6, with an additional Children's Centre on site. The school population is diverse with a wide range of cultures and ethnicities represented. Almost half the school population has EAL and a number of languages are spoken. There are a larger than average number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and the school has an Additional Resource Provision for children with Autism. The school also has a large number of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Upon entry to the school, children within the Nursery and Reception classes complete a

language assessment tool which revealed that there was a high percentage of children entering school without a good level of language. Research has shown that the number of children entering school with low language levels can be up to 50% in areas of social disadvantage,²⁵ and research exploring the abilities of children entering nursery in socially disadvantaged areas found similar prevalence despite other general cognitive abilities being within the average range.²⁶ However, it is important to highlight that whilst a disproportionate number of children in socially disadvantaged areas experience language difficulties, there are also large numbers of children who do not.²⁷

To support children's speech and language within the school, there are two teams, the Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) Team and the Communication Team. The SaLT team consists of an external Speech and Language Therapist and two school practitioners who deliver more targeted therapy to groups of children or 1:1. The Communication Team, consisting of a Reception Teacher and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Lead work across the school promoting the importance of Spoken Language at home and in the classrooms. Working with Liz (SEND Lead), Tara (Reception Teacher) and Teresa (Early Years and Lower School Speech and

25 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000). Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: Facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.

26 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: Implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.

27 Law, J., Todd, L., Clark, J., Mroz, M., & Carr, J. (2013). *Early language delays in the UK*. Save the Children, London.

Language Therapy Team), the SSLiC project aimed to address the high percentage of children entering school with low language levels, through exploring ways of supporting language learning at home.

From the outset, Liz, Tara and Teresa described the importance of working with parents and carers of the school, and described how they would like to support parents to encourage language learning at home. Much research has identified the role that the home environment can play in supporting children's language.²⁸ Whilst the differences in the number of the words spoken in households with different socio-economic backgrounds is well cited,²⁹ research suggests that it is the quality of the spoken input rather than the quantity which is important in supporting children's language growth,³⁰ and the communication environment at home is a stronger predictor of language development than socio-economic status.³¹ Further, Law and colleagues³² suggest that:

“Interventions that focus on training parents and practitioners to talk and interact with babies and young children, especially those that focus on helping adults to use specific language-boosting behaviours in interactions, should result in children learning a greater variety of words more quickly.” (Law, et al. 2017, p. 8)

With this in mind, Liz, Tara and Teresa were interested in considering how they could engage with parents to support their child's language in the home environment.

Research has highlighted how parental involvement can be understood in different ways and that it may be helpful to consider a continuum between parental involvement

with schools, and parental engagement with children's learning.³³ Liz, Tara and Teresa wished to ensure they were working towards greater parental engagement, and identify and overcome any barriers the school may be placing in preventing this.

What was done?

As the key aim of the project was to work collaboratively with parents and carers, it was imperative that parental views on how this could be achieved were sought and quantitative and qualitative data was collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was made available through an on-line link on the school's website and paper copies of the questionnaire were available to parents and carers. The questionnaires were promoted, and made available during the Spring Term parents' evening. The questionnaire was wide ranging in nature and covered a number of topics including parental confidence in using different language learning approaches, their views on accessing support in school and language initiatives that they would find helpful.

Following the questionnaire, 'Open Classrooms' (opportunities for parents to attend lessons during the school day) took place within Nursery, Reception and Year 1 classes. At the Open Classroom events, parents and carers were invited to watch lessons where teachers modelled language learning interactions, and had the opportunity to discuss language needs with members of the Communication Team. Parents were also invited to attend a presentation given by Teresa which included details on typical language development, approaches to supporting language at

28 Tabors, P. O., Snow, C. E., & Dickinson, D. K. (2001). Homes and schools together: Supporting language and literacy development.

29 Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

30 Rowe, M. L. (2012). A longitudinal investigation of the role of quantity and quality of child-directed speech in vocabulary development. *Child development*, 83(5), 1762-1774.

31 Roulstone, S., Law, J., Rush, R., Clegg, J., & Peters, T. (2011). Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes.

32 Law, J., Charlton, J., Dockrell, J., Gascoigne, M., McKean, C., & Theakston, A. (2017). *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and Intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds*. Institute of Education, London.

33 Goodall, J., & Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Educational Review*, 66(4), 399-410.

home and signposting should parents be concerned about their child's language development. Additionally, parents and carers were also given a resource pack which included information and activities for parents and carers to complete at home.

Finally, the information obtained from the questionnaire and Open Classroom event informed the development of an additional section of the school's website focusing on Speech, Language and Communication and includes a rich variety of information, videos, resources and links to external websites.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

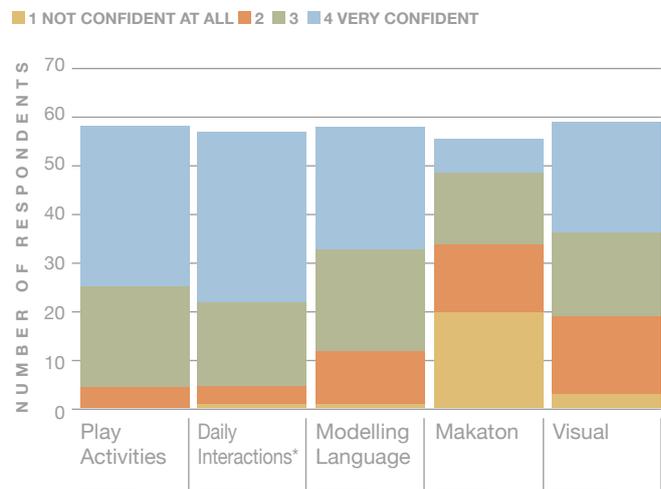
Sixty responses (50 online and 10 paper copies) were received from parents and carers during a 3-week period in which the questionnaire was available.

Parental / Carer confidence in using language learning strategies and approaches

Using a rating scale between 1 and 4, where 1 is 'not very confident at all', and 4 is 'very confident', respondents were asked to rate their confidence in using a number of different strategies and approaches. Figure 1 illustrates a summary of the findings related to this:



Figure 1: Reported confidence in using language learning strategies and approaches at home



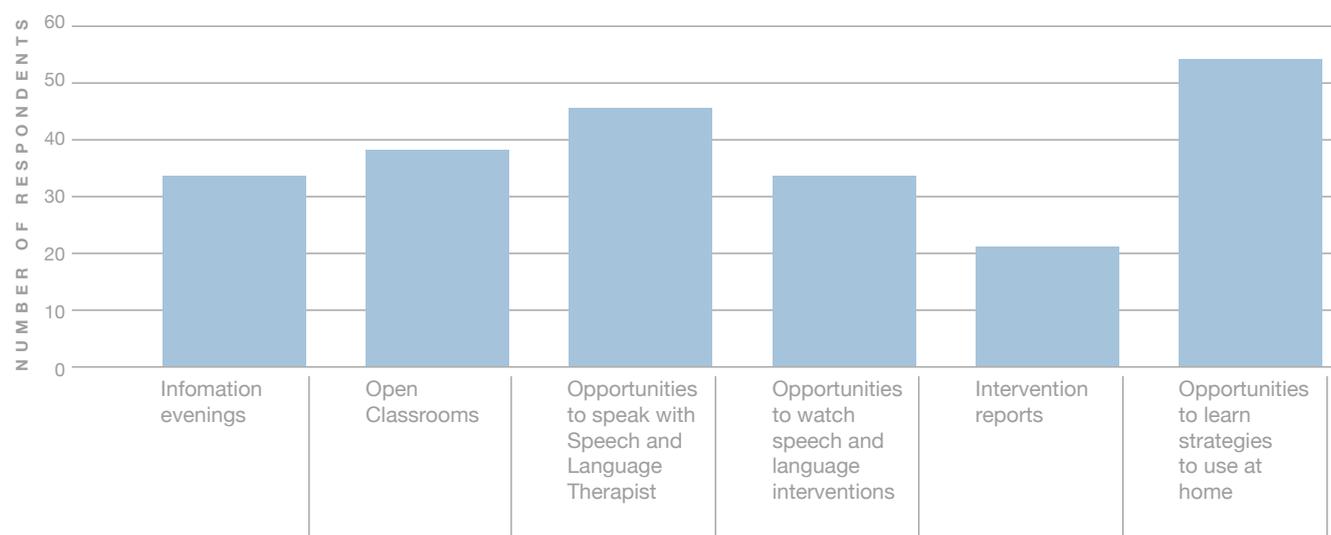
*Additional information and examples were provided in the questionnaire to explain what Daily Interactions and Modelling Language consisted of.

The results show that Daily Interactions and Play Activities were the approaches which most respondents rated themselves as being 'very confident' in. However, strategies such as using Makaton and Visuals appeared to be approaches which respondents rated themselves as being less confident in using, and Modelling Language was a strategy where there appeared to be the most variability in confidence. Based on this the Communication Team incorporated opportunities at the Open Classroom events, and resources on the website, to provide additional support on Makaton, Modelling Language and using visuals.

Accessing support in school

Part of the questionnaire explored parent and carer views in accessing support in school. The majority of respondents (86%) felt confident in being able to approach the school with any concerns and there appeared a good awareness that the school offered speech and language therapy, with 83% of respondents reporting that they were aware of this. Less than half the

Figure 2: School-based activities which respondents feel would be helpful in supporting their child's language



respondents were aware that One to One Interventions (30%), Makaton Training (26%) or Group Interventions (23%) were available, and only 11% of respondents were aware that a translator was available. It may be that parents and carers are less aware of these other means of support if there hasn't previously been a need to engage with it.

Additionally, respondents identified that the person they would most likely contact if there were concerns regarding the child's language would be the class teacher with 76% of respondents selecting this option, followed by the 14% of respondents suggesting that they would contact the SENCO. This has important implications as research has shown that teachers can feel unprepared and lack the skill and confidence in supporting children's language needs.³⁴

When considering what support is currently working well in the school, open responses on the questionnaire identified two main areas: Literacy, including Phonics and English support, and SaLT. Further, when asked to consider areas for improvement of

language support, open responses related to themes of Communication and Opportunity were most frequently given. For example, respondents included comments on how they would appreciate further information on what language support is available and feedback on what input is happening, and that they would also appreciate further opportunities to learn strategies such as Makaton, as well as opportunities to discuss their child's progress further and informal sessions such as coffee mornings.

Open responses also related to those families for whom English is an additional language, and some respondents identified that it would be helpful to have opportunities to learn English with their children and that greater support could be offered for EAL new starters to the school.

Language initiatives

The questionnaire further explored what additional activities the school could do to help support children's language, as illustrated in Figure 2.

³⁴ Dockrell, J. E., Howell, P., Leung, D., & Fugard, A. J. (2017). Children with speech language and communication needs in England: Challenges for practice. *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 2, p. 35). Frontiers.

Table 1: Parent perspectives on helpful information on the school website

| Theme | Suggestions |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Resources | Signposting to useful websites |
| | Flash cards |
| | Useful books |
| | Visuals which can be downloaded at home |
| | Links to useful resources and tools |
| Makaton / Sign Language | Common Makaton signs |
| | Seasonal Makaton signs |
| | Opportunities to learn sign language |
| | Information on Makaton |
| Information | Ideas on how parents can help at home |
| | Age appropriate targets to work on at home |
| | Updates on progress |
| | Suggestions on supporting sentence structure and everyday conversations |
| | Video tutorials |
| Learning Entertainment | Games to play |
| | Quizzes |
| | Word games |

The results showed that opportunities to learn new strategies to use at home was the most popular response, followed by opportunities to speak to Speech and Language Therapists and Open Classrooms. These findings, along with the open responses relating to areas for improvement, informed the Open Classroom events so that they included opportunities to new learn new strategies to use at home, along with opportunities to speak with Speech and Language Therapists.

Further, there were a greater number of parents and carers (73%) who hadn't previously attended parent/carer training, although there appeared to be an interest in attending training for parent / carers with 72% respondents indicating their interest.

Finally, parents and carers were asked to suggest information and resources which they would find useful on the new Speech,

Language and Communication section of the website. The responses appeared to be grouped into the following areas presented in Table 1.

These suggestions have subsequently informed a section within the Speech, Language and Communication area on 'How we can support you as a parent/carer'. For example, resources such as a key word Makaton booklet, Visuals which can be downloaded to use at home, Top Tips area and further information on progress reports have been included. Further, there are plans to develop video tutorials in the next academic year.

The findings of the questionnaire not only provided opportunity for parents and carers to share their views, but these views were acted on and informed the development and content of the Open Classroom events and website development. There are also

plans to hold termly coffee mornings, and more frequent sharing of language progress reports. However, whilst there was engagement with the questionnaire, attendance at the Open Classrooms was less than hoped for. There may have been a number of factors impacting on this, for example, attending events during the school day can be a barrier for those parents with work or additional childcare commitments. Additionally, research has identified a number of factors which may make a school hard to reach for some families.³⁵

In addition, Liz, Tara and Teresa described how the project has had a positive impact in increasing understanding amongst school staff as to the importance of spoken language within the classroom. Despite this, there was some apprehension about the Open Classroom event from some teachers and teaching assistants, related to both their confidence in using language learning strategies and the unfamiliarity of an event focusing on language, rather than overall learning. However, through modelling and support from Liz, Tara and Teresa, the confidence in using language learning strategies within the classroom has increased.

Key Learning

Whilst there may be a number of factors which can influence how schools and parents work collaboratively,³⁶ this project has demonstrated the breadth of pertinent insights that parents have into how they may support their child's language at home. The project has revealed that parents are interested in discovering additional ways to develop their understanding and the importance of having opportunities to develop this understanding. However, it also appears that in order to apply this understanding at home, parents feel they would benefit from additional support and concrete resources which they can use. It can be argued that schools play a greater role in providing this support; however, it may be a challenge for schools to do so. Given the crucial role which language plays in a child's learning, social and emotional development and their future academic attainment, it is imperative that schools explore further ways of going beyond the school gates into children's homes.



35 Crozier, G., & Davies, J. (2007). Hard to reach parents or hard to reach schools? A discussion of home – school relations, with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(3), 295-313.

36 Hornby, G., & Lafaale, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63(1), 37-52.

Granard Primary School:

Supporting professional development through the use of Communication Buddies

Research Team and Setting

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Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou, SSLiC Facilitator, UCL Centre for Inclusive Education and Lecturer in Psychology in Education, School of Education, University of Bristol

Background

Granard Primary school is situated in Wandsworth, south-west London, and serves a diverse community. According to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), the school is in the highest 10% of social deprivation and, thus, there are a large number of children from families of high social disadvantage. The school has a Children's Centre attached to it which focuses its work on supporting families who live in a high level of deprivation as early as possible, since early intervention appears to be key for ensuring successful outcomes for children with SLCN.³⁷

Granard Primary school has a higher than average number of children with SEND. An analysis of the types of SEND demonstrated a high prevalence of SLCN between the

ages of 3 and 8 (EYFS and KS1), a figure also highlighted within government statistics as the most prevalent area of SEND in mainstream primary schools.³⁸ The picture of needs, however, changes as children progress in KS2 with the primary need relating to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs or Cognition and Learning. This is unsurprising given the strong links demonstrated in research between language difficulties and SEMH needs^{39,40,41} as well as learning needs.^{42,43}

Furthermore, Liz identified that, consistently over the past few years, there appeared to be a large number of children entering the school who are either non-verbal, have very poor communication skills, and/or do not speak English. Research has shown that the number of children entering school with low language levels can be up to 50% in areas of social disadvantage,⁴⁴ and research exploring the abilities of children entering nursery in socially disadvantaged areas found similar prevalence despite other general cognitive abilities being within the average range.⁴⁵ However, as previously described, whilst a disproportionate number of children in socially disadvantaged areas experience

37 Snowling, M.J., Adams, J.W., Bishop, D.V., & Stothard, S.E. (2001). Educational attainments of school leavers with a preschool history of speech-language impairments. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 36(2), 173-183.

38 Department for Education. (2017). *Statistical First Release: Special Educational Needs in England*. DfE, London.

39 Bakopoulou, I., & Dockrell, J.E. (2016). The role of social cognition and prosocial behaviour in relation to the socio-emotional functioning of primary aged children with specific language impairment. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 49, 354-370.

40 Yew, S.G.K., & O'Kearney, R. (2013). Emotional and behavioural outcomes later in childhood and adolescence for children with specific language impairments: meta-analyses of controlled prospective studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(5), 516-524.

41 Lindsay, G., & Dockrell, J.E. (2012). The relationship between speech, language and communication needs and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Better Communication Research Programme, DfE-RR247-BCRP6.

42 Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational context, student satisfaction, and post-compulsory progress. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 44(1), 36-55.

43 Harrison, L. J., McLeod, S., Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2009). Literacy, numeracy, and learning in school-aged children identified as having speech and language impairment in early childhood. *International Journal of Speech and Language Pathology*, 11(5), 392-403.

44 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000) Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.

45 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.

language difficulties, there are also large numbers of children who do not.⁴⁶

Given the large number of children at the school identified with SLCN or as having low language levels, a priority area of focus for the SSLiC programme at Granard Primary was to promote high quality teaching to develop the language and communication skills of all children through the development of strong language learning environments, which research^{47,48} suggests can prepare children for the more challenging demands placed on oracy as they proceed through school but also reduce the numbers of children identified as experiencing SLCN. Promoting high quality language teaching was also included in the School Improvement Plan, highlighting even further the importance the school places on oral language development.

An essential element of a communication supporting school is to ensure the quality of adult – child interactions and the ways in which language is used and developed in the classroom.⁴⁹ The importance of the adult role is well documented in research^{50,51} although there are also concerns expressed by educational professionals related to them feeling unprepared and lacking the skill and confidence in identifying⁵² and supporting children’s language needs.⁵³ Liz completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit which revealed that most domains were being developed already and there is a range

of existing good practice within the school. However, there was an acknowledgement that staff would benefit from additional support in creating communication supporting classrooms by enhancing the physical classroom environment, providing language learning opportunities and ensuring a consistent use of language learning interaction techniques by all members of staff.

What was done?

A Granard Communication Team was set up including volunteers from the school community who wanted to be involved in the Granard SSLiC Programme. These ranged from the site manager to the school’s SaLT. The Granard SSLiC Programme worked on the following targets:

Creating a philosophy of language learning and promoting the importance of oral language

The Granard Communication Team developed a philosophy of language learning which they believe influences the choices school staff make in structuring the physical environment of the classroom, designing language learning opportunities and interacting with children.⁵⁴ The philosophy of language learning is suggested in research⁵⁵ to support Communication Teams into taking a principled approach to creating communication supporting environments

46 Law, J., Todd, L., Clark, J., Mroz, M., & Carr, J. (2013). *Early language delays in the UK*. Save the Children, London.

47 Dockrell, J.E., Lindsay, G., Roulstone, S., & Law, J. (2014). Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: An overview of the results of the Better Communication Research Programme. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 49, 43-57.

48 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 271-286.

49 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

50 Hoff, E. (2003). The specificity of environmental influence: Socioeconomic status affects early vocabulary development via maternal speech. *Child Development*, 74, 1368-1378.

51 Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review*. DFES, Nottingham.

52 Dockrell, J.E., & Hurry, J. (2018). The identification of speech and language problems in elementary school: Diagnosis and co-occurring needs. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 81, 52-64

53 Dockrell, J.E., Howell, P., Leung, D., & Fugard, A.J. (2017). Children with speech, language and communication needs in England: challenges for practice. *Frontiers in Education*, 2, 35.

54 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36-44.

55 Kotter, J.P. (2012). *Leading Change*, Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, Mass.

and creating a clear vision for change. This included the reasons why oral language is important and acknowledged how the adults have a strong role in supporting and developing this.

“We believe that language is the vehicle for learning. We know that children who have a higher vocabulary will have distinct advantages in life. It is essential for us to develop our children’s spoken language. We want our children to approach social situations with confidence, express their emotions, wants and need.

We want our children to be happy learners who can understand the world they live in.

All Granard Primary staff will ensure that rich language is taught and modelled through learning and play. We will provide a stimulating environment and an exciting curriculum.”

The philosophy of language learning was shared with all school staff and parents. In addition, school staff created a strap line to use in their email signature. This is ‘Talk more, learn more’.

Supporting school staff’s professional development in creating communication supporting classrooms

At the beginning of the SSLiC Programme, all staff in the Early Years and KS1 were asked to carry out individual observations of their classroom environments using the CSCOT. In a staff meeting, Liz and the school’s SaLT introduced the SSLiC programme and gave each teacher a Communication Buddy. The Communication Buddies were given a two-week timeframe to conduct an observation of their buddy and share examples of good practice as well as areas for development in the following staff

meeting. The focus of the observation was on positive and constructive peer feedback. Using that information, each teacher set their own target they were going to focus on for the upcoming fortnight. The target was displayed in a bright orange speech bubble in the classrooms for all staff and children to see. A separate meeting was organised for all support staff and the same task and expectation was delivered. Every two weeks subsequent to the initial staff meeting allowed time for the Communication Buddies (teachers and support staff) to meet up, discuss and review their targets and set new ones. Each target was kept on a recorder log (kept by Liz) and clearly displayed on the classroom’s orange speech bubble.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The main outcome of the SSLiC Granard Project is strong evidence of all school staff recognising the importance of and sharing the same vision for the development of children’s language and communication.

In order to evaluate the project three main approaches were taken:

A) Screening children’s language skills before and after the SSLiC programme

The Communication Team carried out language screening for Nursery, Reception and Year 1 children who were on the SEND register at the beginning and at the end of the SSLiC programme. The EYFS children were screened using the ‘Explore and Talk’ screening tool (a tool developed by Wandsworth SALT services), whilst children in Year 1 were screened using the ‘Teach Talk’ screening tool (also developed by Wandsworth SALT services). An analysis of the results at the end of the SSLiC Programme indicated that:

Table 2: Percentage of scores in the three CSCOT domains

| CSCOT Domain | LLE | | LLO | | LLE | |
|-------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| Time | Nov 17 | June 18 | Nov 17 | June 18 | Nov 17 | June 18 |
| | 64% | 82% | 49% | 70% | 54% | 65% |
| Score Differences | 18% | | 21% | | 11% | |

- 7 out of 9 pupils in the EYFS made progress in their language and communication (78%).
- 10 out of 16 pupils in KS1 made progress in their language and communication (63%).
- 3 pupils in KS1 scored the same total from the beginning to the end (13%).

The results above demonstrate that the SSLiC Granard project has been very successful with a significant impact on children's language and communication levels.

B) Using the CSCOT to profile the classroom environment before and after the SSLiC programme

In addition, at the end of the Granard SSLiC Programme (June 2018), the Communication Buddies conducted a final observation using the CSCOT to mark any improvements from the original observations conducted in November 2017. The rating system of the CSCOT was used and staff were asked to rate their Communication Buddies Language Learning Environment on a scale of 19 points, their Language Learning Opportunities offered on a scale of 25 points and their Language Learning Interactions on a scale of 100 points. An analysis of the CSCOTs can be seen in Table 2 above.

The observations above demonstrate

that the project has had a very positive impact in increasing understanding amongst school staff as to how children develop their receptive and expressive language skills and the ways the adults can monitor classroom interactions and respond by altering the classroom context to support the development of oracy skills. Observational learning and mentoring was the key approach used in the SSLiC Granard Project to improve adult behaviour when interacting with children, an approach increasingly supported by research.^{56,57} The CSCOT provided staff with a complementary approach to universal intervention where they could observe each other's classrooms, and the evidence produced was used to set targets and develop new approaches.

C) Qualitative feedback through staff questionnaires

Finally, school staff were asked to complete a questionnaire reflecting on the programme as well as their professional development. Staff were asked to comment on whether they felt they have developed their awareness in developing and supporting spoken language in the classroom. The overwhelming majority of the teachers (94%) responded positively to this question, talking about the programme having had a great impact on their professional development. The majority of staff (88%) also thought the children have made progress with

56 Girolametto, L., Hoaken, L., Weitzman, E., & van Lieshout, R. (2000). Patterns of adult-child linguistic interaction in integrated day care groups. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 31, 155-168.

57 Justice, L.M., Mashburn, A.J., Harare, B.K., & Pianta, R.C. (2008). Quality of language and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms serving at-risk pupils. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 23, 51-68.

their language development from setting a personal target every fortnight, and 81% felt that they have altered their approach to developing children's spoken language. Teachers were asked to review their target and review sheets and indicate in their opinion which target has had the most impact. The top four responses were:

1. Introducing Talk Partners
2. Introducing new vocabulary
3. Using open-ended questions
4. Encouraging children to speak in full sentences

Teachers were also asked about changes seen in children and felt that the children are now more confident in talking as a result of the SSLiC programme, use their talking partners more and speak in full sentences with a range of new vocabularies. They reported that they would like to continue to reflect and review the development of children's language in their classroom by continuing using key language learning interaction techniques, planning for talk opportunities and ensuring talk and discussion is at the forefront of lesson planning.

Key Learning

The SSLiC Granard Project has demonstrated that adopting a systematic and thorough approach which could be embedded in every day classroom practice is key when the aim is to effect whole-school changes and support staff's professional development. Developing children's oral language will continue to be in Granard Primary's School Improvement Plan, demonstrating the importance attached to oral language. Underpinning the project has been the process of using a robust and repeatable audit and observation tool as a means of staff professional development with a focus on regular opportunities to provide constructive peer feedback to identify areas for personal and school development and address these in everyday teaching practice. This has been a time-consuming process for school staff at Granard Primary, but one that has been identified as successful in supporting professional development. The challenge now will be how to maintain the process and sustain the improvements over time.



Granton Primary School:

Increasing school staff's knowledge in identifying communication needs and recognising the natural progression of EAL acquisition

Research Team and Setting

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Katie McCarthy, Early Years Foundation Stage Leader, Granton Primary School, London

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Background

Granton is a larger than average Lambeth primary school with 600 pupils on roll. The school population is diverse with a wide range of cultures and ethnicities represented. More than half of the school population (58%) has English as an Additional Language (EAL) with over 60 languages spoken. The school also has a larger number of pupils eligible for free school meals and has high levels of pupil premium (40%). Upon entry to the school, many of the children demonstrate very low starting points in their overall skills and in particular in their language and communication skills, a pattern often reported in areas of social disadvantage.⁵⁸ It was also acknowledged by the SSLiC Granton Project team that children with EAL as well as children with

English as their first language have varying levels of ability in speaking and listening in their first language.

A key focus within the school's improvement plan relates to language and communication, demonstrated by the fact that two Speech and Language Therapists (SALTs) and a full-time EAL Coordinator are employed to track children's progress and support SLCN. Therefore, a key rationale for the SSLiC Granton Project was to promote high quality teaching to develop the language and communication skills of all children through the development of strong language learning environments, which research^{59,60} suggests can prepare children for the more challenging demands placed on oracy as they proceed through school but also reduce the numbers of children identified as SLCN.

A key priority within the school's improvement plan was to increase the skills of staff in identifying and assessing communication needs, as well as recognising the natural progression of EAL acquisition. In that way, it was hoped that staff awareness would be raised of what 'the norm' developmentally is for both children with EAL and children who speak English as their first language in Reception and Year 1. Research points to teachers' varying level of experience when it comes to identification of speaking and listening skills

58 Law, J., Todd, L., Clark, J., Mroz, M., & Carr, J. (2013). *Early language delays in the UK*. Save the Children, London.

59 Dockrell, J.E., Lindsay, G., Roulstone, S., & Law, J. (2014). Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: An overview of the results of the Better Communication Research Programme. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 49, 43-57.

60 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 271-286.

with recent studies reporting on teachers feeling unprepared and lacking the skill and confidence in supporting children's language needs.⁶¹ There is also evidence suggesting that there may be some confusion regarding the identification of SLCN in children with EAL. In particular, research⁶² points to a disproportionate number of children with EAL also being identified as having SLCN. Therefore, the ultimate aim of the SSLiC Granton project was to ensure that all children's difficulties with speech and language are identified early and catered for, since early identification appears to be key for ensuring successful outcomes for children with SLCN as it allows for timely intervention.⁶³

Along with a school improvement priority on increasing staff's skills in identification and assessment of communication needs, there was a specific target of making alterations to the classroom's physical environment and learning context to support the development of oracy skills. The SSLiC Granton Project team argued that by organising the classroom space to maximise language enhancement, the school could add an additional layer of infrastructure to promoting the quality and quantity of children's oral language experiences as supported by research.⁶⁴

What was done?

In order to support change across the school, a Communication Team was set up including the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Inclusion Leaders alongside one Reception class teacher and one Year

1 class teacher. Analysis of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit identified that the school had a number of well-developed practices in the domains of Language Leadership, Staff Professional Development and Learning and Identifying and Supporting SLCN. Lisa and Katie also spent time in Reception and Year 1 classrooms using the CSCOT⁶⁵ and identified many strengths in all three domains. The CSCOTs, for example, identified strengths in the language learning opportunities provided in classrooms as well as a variety of language learning interaction techniques frequently used by school staff when talking with children. However, areas of development were also identified and actions were decided upon and included:

Developing a consistent approach for assessing speech and language skills for Reception and Year 1

In consultation with the school's SALT, the Granton Communication Team decided on a particular screening tool that enabled them to screen children in the Reception and Year 1 classes for whom they had initial concerns but who were not involved with the SALT. Class teachers were asked to refer children from their class for whom they had concerns and, as a result, 33 children were screened using 2 members of staff.

Creating communication supporting environments

The Granton Communication Team observed 10 classrooms in EYFS and Year 1 and fed back to class teachers who addressed the results of the CSCOT. In particular, teachers made alterations to the Language Learning Environment and the Language

61 Dockrell, J.E., Howell, P., Leung, D., & Fugard, A.J. (2017). Children with speech, language and communication needs in England: Challenges in practice. *Frontiers in Education*, 2, 35.

62 Meschi, E., Mickelwright, J., Vignoles, A., & Lindsay, G. (2012). *The transition between categories of special educational needs of pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as they progress through the education system*. DfE, London.

63 Showling, M.J., Adams, J.W., Bishop, D.V., & Stothard, S.E. (2001). Educational attainments of school leavers with a preschool history of speech-language impairments. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 36(2), 173-183.

64 Roskos, K., & Neuman, S. (2002). Environment and its influences for early literacy teaching and learning. In Neuman, S. and Dickinson, D. (eds) *Handbook of early literacy research*. The Guildford Press, New York, 281-294.

65 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf.

Learning Interactions dimensions of the CSCOT. In terms of alterations to the classroom environment, it was ensured that musical instruments are available daily both indoors but also outside in the play areas. In addition, interactive displays allowing for children's comments were developed in all Reception and Year 1 classrooms. Also, a variety of books related to the current curriculum topic are now available and renewed when the curriculum topic or class themes change. Finally, although a decision was made to develop the role play areas for all Year 1 classrooms, financial constraints meant that work for this target could only start at the end of the current project. The Granton Communication Team have now started building this up through the scrap project resources.

In terms of work undertaken to improve the Language Learning Interactions, sentence starters are now regularly highlighted by Year 1 teachers to provide a model for children and are reinforced by all support staff in the classroom.

Increasing staff's knowledge and skills in identifying and assessing communication needs as well as recognising the natural progression of EAL acquisition

To support staff's professional development, it was decided that Teaching Assistants (TAs) working regularly in EYFS and Year 1 classrooms could be mentored by a Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) to enhance speech and language skills and interactions with children. The TAs and HLTA met regularly and used the CSCOT, in particular the third dimension of Language Learning Interactions, as a mentoring and professional development tool.

What were the findings of the project?

The main outcome of the SSLiC Granton Project is strong evidence of all school staff recognising the importance of and sharing the same vision for the development of children's language and communication. The project has had a positive impact in increasing understanding amongst school staff as to how children develop their receptive and expressive language skills and the ways the adults can monitor classroom interactions and respond by altering the classroom context to support the development of oracy skills. Observational learning and mentoring was the key approach used in the SSLiC Granton Project to improve adult behaviour when interacting with children, an approach increasingly supported by research.^{66,67} The CSCOT provided staff with a complementary approach to universal intervention where they could observe each other's classrooms, and the evidence produced was used to set targets and develop new approaches.

Importantly, with the introduction of a new screening tool, staff demonstrated increased awareness of EAL developmental milestones for speaking and listening. Results of the screening tool highlighted that some children had been flagged up by class teachers but transpired to be 'normally developing' children with EAL, a pattern also showed in research. More worryingly, some children had not been flagged up but showed language and communication as an area of need – of the 33 children assessed there were 4 children who merited referral to SALT and these were both children with EAL and children who spoke English

66 Girolametto, L., Hoaken, L., Weitzman, E., & van Lieshout, R. (2000). Patterns of adult-child linguistic interaction in integrated day care groups. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 31, 155-168.

67 Justice, L.M., Mashburn, A.J., Harare, B.K., & Pianta, R.C. (2008). Quality of language and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms serving at-risk pupils. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 23, 51-68.

as their first language. As a result of the screening, particular areas for development were identified, including prepositions, sequencing, past tense of verbs and pronouns, and these will be areas of focus for language work, for example during Talking Tables time.

Moving forward, the Granton Communication Team identified that this screening tool will now be incorporated in the transition pack for new children starting in Reception during home visits and staff and parents will be encouraged to complete this together. In addition, the screening tool will be introduced to all in-year inductions.

Key learning

The revised SEND Code of Practice⁶⁸ places an increased emphasis on teachers having responsibility for the progress of children with SLCN. Whilst this move is encouraged, it is not without its challenges and teachers have raised concerns as to the difficulties in recognising language needs⁶⁹ and the challenges in meeting the needs of children with language difficulties. To assist educational professionals in this work a number of resources seemed to be welcomed: the SSLiC Granton Project demonstrated that screening tools assessing language and communication skills could be used as an aid to support the early identification of children with specific language needs, and evidence-based observation tools could be used as a whole-school resource to evaluate and support effective teaching practice for all children as part of continuing professional development.

The SSLiC Granton Project also highlighted that adults in schools have a key role in scaffolding interactions⁷⁰ with a number of different techniques being important in enhancing children's expressive and receptive language skills.⁷¹ For example, specific language learning interaction techniques which include modelling of target words, expanding the utterance and recasting are thought to lead to faster language acquisition,⁷² and competence in the use of strategies such as extending, labelling and scripting are fundamental to providing high quality verbal input.⁷³ However, it is also recognised that these techniques need to be incorporated into the daily classroom teaching as they are often used less frequently than would be hoped.⁷⁴ Therefore, the challenge will remain as to how to continue to apply and incorporate these techniques in typical classroom practice.



68 Department for Education (2015). Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years.

69 Dockrell, J.E., & Hurry, J. (2018). The identification of speech and language problems in elementary school: Diagnosis and co-occurring needs. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 81, 52-64

70 Law, J., Charlton, J., Dockrell, J.E., Gascoigne, M., Mckean, C., & Thekston, A. (2017). *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantage backgrounds*. Institute of Education, London.

71 Dickinson, D.K., Hofer, K.G., Barnes, E.M., & Grifenhagen, J.F. (2014). Examining teachers' language in Head Start classrooms from a Systematic Linguistics Approach. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(3), 231-244.

72 Chapman, R.S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Applied Disciplines*, 41(1), 33-54.

73 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(2), 36-44.

74 Girolametto, L., Weitzman, E., & Greenberg, J. (2003). Training day care staff to facilitate children's language. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 12(3), 299-311.

King's Ford Infant School and Nursery:

Supporting language through the development of a whole-school approach to the use of visual materials and thinking in groups

Research Team and Setting

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Background

Situated in Colchester, Essex, King's Ford is a 2 form Infant School and Nursery. The school's population includes a large number of Service Children (25%) and those with EAL (17%), and the school serves an area of social disadvantage. Within the school there is a broadly average number of children with SEND and the majority of the children on the SEND register have SLCN. The school has in place a wide range of provision to support SLCN including language screening upon entry to the school, a Speech and Language Learning Support Assistant and small group language interventions including early talk boost and Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI). There is a key focus within the school's development plan regarding language and communication.

Analysis from the initial SSLiC Self-Assessment Audit and the CSCOT identified a number of strengths across the school, and within each Audit domain there were several

items illustrating a well-developed area of work. Polly and Vicky were keen to build on the already strong foundations in supporting children with identified SLCN; however, there were a large number of children entering the school with lower than hoped for language levels, a pattern frequently seen in areas of social disadvantage.⁷⁵ Therefore, a key rationale for the project was to promote high quality teaching to develop language skills for all children, with research suggesting that if schools provide environments which are conducive for effective language learning then the numbers of children identified as SLCN should reduce.⁷⁶

With this in mind, focusing on the Communication Supporting Classrooms domain of the SSLiC Self-Assessment Audit, further analysis of CSCOT identified that there could be more instances of staff using visuals as a means of reinforcing language. The use of visuals in supporting language has been well recognised within the research literature. For example, visuals are thought to be a key component of a language rich classroom environment⁷⁷ and visual support, for example using pictures, objects, symbols, signing and written words, has been found to be effective when verbal language alone is insufficient.⁷⁸ Further, it has been argued that visuals can support with understanding new and complex language,⁷⁹ and that they

75 Law, J., Todd, L., Clark, J., Mroz, M., & Carr, J. (2013). *Early language delays in the UK*. Save the Children, London.

76 Dockrell, J., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer S. & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 1-16.

77 Justice, L. M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(2), 36-44.

78 Wellington, W., & Stackhouse, J. (2011). Using visual support for language and learning in children with SLCN: A training programme for teachers and teaching assistants. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 183-201.

79 Wellington, W., & Wellington, J. (2002). Children with communication difficulties in mainstream science classrooms. *School Science Review*, 83, 81-92.

can be an effective strategy to implement as part of a whole school approach.⁸⁰

A further area for development arising from the CSCOT was that there was greater opportunity to allow for all children to be included in group work, and more opportunities for children to engage in structured conversations with their peers. This informed the future direction of the study, which was to consider ways in which children could be supported in using language for collaborative group work. Research has suggested that there are more opportunities to develop language within group contexts⁸¹ and that the use of structured group tasks can serve as an important basis for providing opportunities for active participation, producing language in meaningful contexts and for authentic communication.⁸² Further, alongside promoting the development of language, these opportunities can support the way in which talk is used for thinking. For example, research has argued that talk is fundamental to the development of reasoning and understanding,⁸³ and that certain types of talking such as discussing, collaborating and problem solving are thought to be valuable to learning.⁸⁴

What was done?

The project had two main strands to enhancing the current universal provision, including the development of visual materials across the school, and the development of opportunities for children's talk in collaborative group work.

Developing visual materials

In order to develop visual materials across the school, two approaches were used. This included the introduction of signs, pictures and symbols as key visuals, along with developing story sacks (bags with stories and supporting props, visuals and materials). In terms of the key visuals, firstly, Polly and Vicky identified three contexts where it was hoped visuals could be used to reinforce language – these were supporting routines, emotional regulation and learning. Developmentally appropriate key words and phrases relating to these areas were identified and staff views were sought as to the type of visual support they would find useful. For example, visuals can come in a range of forms including symbols, photos, or cartoon representations. Following the feedback from staff, 26 core visuals were selected to be used across the school and nursery. A staff meeting was held to introduce staff to the theoretical basis for using visuals, and staff had the opportunity to read and critique journal articles. Importantly, it has been suggested that for visual support to be used, and sustained, teachers need to understand the rationale for using visuals along with how to use them.⁸⁵ In order to encourage the use of the visuals, Polly and Vicky created lanyards for all staff. This allowed for greater flexibility as staff were able to choose the most appropriate visuals for their classes and groups, alongside ensuring that the visuals were easily accessible to children. Observations were then used to explore staff practice in using the key visuals.

80 Leyden, J., Stackhouse, J., & Szczerbinski, M. (2011). Implementing a whole school approach to support speech, language and communication: Perceptions of key staff. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 27(2), 203-222.

81 Turnbull, K. P., Anthony, A. B., Justice, L., & Bowles, R. (2009). Preschoolers' exposure to language stimulation in classrooms serving at-risk children: The contribution of group size and activity context. *Early Education and Development*, 20(1), 53-79.

82 Lotan, R. A. (2008). Developing language and mastering content in heterogeneous classrooms. In *The teacher's role in implementing cooperative learning in the classroom* (184-200). Springer, Boston, Mass.

83 Mercer, N. (2008). Talk and the development of reasoning and understanding. *Human development*, 51(1), 90-100.

84 Resnick, L. B., Michaels, S., & O'Connor, C. (2010). How (well structured) talk builds the mind. *Innovations in educational psychology: Perspectives on Learning, Teaching and Human Development*, 163-194.

85 Alant, E. (2003). A developmental approach towards teacher training: a contradiction in terms. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Developmental Issues*, 335-357.

Table 3: Collaborative talk strategies

| Lesson No. | Curriculum focus | Strategies to develop collaborative talk |
|------------|--|--|
| 2 | RE – learning about the creation story | Jigsaw approach (ABC groups where all the A's learn one thing the B's learn something else etc. so each pupil is an expert on their bit and then shares it with their group) |
| 3 | PSHE – how people's behaviour can affect others | Success criteria for talking (with a partner or small group). Freeze frame (a dramatic activity where pupils make a frozen or still picture) Rotating circle (each pupil takes it in turns to share an answer before rotating to someone else) Ideas funnel (pupils generate as many ideas as possible before prioritising) |
| 4 | Maths – number work | Pre-teaching before the lesson |

Additionally, in order to develop the use of story sacks, the school worked with parents of the Adult Learning Community to create story sacks which could be used within the Nursery and Foundation Stage classrooms. Research has shown that exposure to props and materials, along with adult interaction, can support children to learn new words and apply background knowledge to new learning contexts. To create the story sacks, the parents selected their favourite story and over the course of 6 parent workshops, they created visuals and props to reinforce their chosen story. Once the story sacks were created, parents shared these with the Nursery and Foundation Stage children.

Developing collaborative talk

Alongside the work on developing visual materials in the school, within Year 1 and 2, a lesson study approach was used to develop opportunities for collaborative talk. Within a lesson study approach, the aim is to complete cycles of 'research lessons' which are jointly planned, taught/observed and analysed by a lesson study group.⁸⁶ In this instance, the lesson study group was

comprised of Polly, a class teacher and learning support assistant, and had the focus of exploring strategies to increase pupil participation and talk within group tasks.

Prior to the lesson study, 5-minute films were taken of 3 target pupils working in different groups. These films identified that the children required a significant amount of adult prompting to be able to verbally contribute to the group activities and none of the children made independent contributions. In order to explore, and develop, strategies to support with collaboration in tasks, over the course of a week, the lesson study team completed 1 observation lesson and 3 research lessons, each where an additional strategy or approach was used. Table 3 highlights the strategies used in the research lessons.

Additionally, the target pupils completed a 5-point scale to explore their views on group work and views on contributing within lessons. These questionnaires were also completed after each lesson study lesson.

Finally, in order to share the feedback from the lesson study, and to encourage

⁸⁶ Dudley, P. (Ed.). (2014). *Lesson Study: Professional learning for our time*. London and New York: Routledge.

greater opportunities for group work and to also promote the strategies which were deemed to be effective in increasing verbal contributions to group work, staff completed a teacher INSET. The INSET was well-received by all staff and teachers were given additional planning time to explore using the structured group activities in lessons.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

There were a number of findings across both the work on embedding visual materials and increasing participation in group work.

Embedding visual materials

The main outcome from the work undertaken on developing visual materials is that the visuals within the classroom are now embedded in practice and used consistently across classes. This has a number of positive implications for the pupils as they progress through the school and particularly as those children in the EYFS transition into Year 1. For example, there can often be large variability amongst classroom environments, with many of the features conducive to an effective language learning environment most likely to be found in a Reception class and decreasing as they go through Key Stage 1.⁸⁷

Furthermore, the introduction of story sacks provided a valuable opportunity for parents to work within the classroom and this opportunity was well-received by the parents who provided positive feedback about the parent workshops and the opportunity to showcase their story sacks in the nursery. Moving forward, within Key Stage 1, story sacks are currently being developed for each of the key texts, and will be introduced within

the next academic year.

These approaches have been used to support all children but have been shown to be of particular use for those children with language difficulties, including those with social communication and interaction difficulties. This correlates with the pre-existing research into the use of visuals for children with language difficulties and it is suggested that children with language difficulties often have strengths in their visual skills.⁸⁸

Developing collaborative talk

Through the lesson study approach a number of key findings have been identified. In particular, the feedback from the research lessons identified that the jigsaw approach and pre-teaching were the most effective strategies in supporting pupils to contribute to the group tasks. In particular, Polly described how:

“The biggest barrier to the children participating in group work was understanding the task and knowing what to say. Therefore, the best interventions were those that had an element of overlearning, pre-teaching or rehearsal. This gave them a better understanding of what they had to do, the right vocabulary to contribute and the confidence to do so.”

A key tenet of both of these approaches is the prior opportunity to think about their responses to a question or discussion before having to share those ideas. Along with additional time, these approaches also provide an opportunity to ‘check out’ responses with a more able other, a key element within social learning and sociocultural theories as it is the mediation and interaction with another suggested

87 Dockrell, J. (2012). Developing a communication supporting classrooms observation tool. London: Department for Education. [https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE RR247-BCRP7](https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE%20RR247-BCRP7).

88 Archibald, L. M., & Gathercole, S. E. (2006). Visuospatial immediate memory in specific language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 49(2), 265-277.

89 Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 41(1), 54.

supports language acquisition.⁸⁹ Further, a number of research studies have identified the positive gains which can be made to children's oral language when interventions targeting pre-teaching and reinforcing vocabulary have been implemented.^{90, 91}

In addition to the insights gained through the research lesson as to strategies which support children's talk in groups, a number of unstructured observations also identified many strengths demonstrated by the pupils. For example, pupils made relevant contributions to the task, showed turn-taking skills and were able to suggest ideas and explain how they arrived at an answer.

Furthermore, the pupil questionnaires which were administered following each research lesson showed an increase in the target pupils' views on how happy they felt doing group work and an increase in how much they felt they had to say when working in a group.

Finally, a key outcome from the project was the increased staff awareness, and recognition of the importance, of an oral language classroom.



Key Learning

This project has demonstrated how making use of appropriate research can lead to positive outcomes in the delivery of language interventions in the classroom. By engaging with school staff and involving them in the process of designing appropriate visuals, the rationale and theoretical basis for the project was successfully shared, which arguably assisted with the delivery of the programme. Previous research has identified the challenges for teachers in using research evidence to inform their teaching practice.⁹²

Underpinning the study has been the process of using a robust and repeatable audit, recognising areas for development and finally implementing approaches to address the development areas. It is believed that using an evidence-based approach to give a solid basis on which to build can be repeated for other environments, and that the process as a whole is iterative and informs future implementations. The challenge will be how to maintain the process and sustain the approaches over time, ensure that the learning from one can be used to complement others.

90 Dyson, H., Solity, J., Best, W., & Hulme, C. (2018). Effectiveness of a small-group vocabulary intervention programme: evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *International journal of language & communication disorders*.

91 Bowyer-Crane, C., Snowling, M. J., Duff, F. J., Fieldsend, E., Carroll, J. M., Miles, J., ... & Hulme, C. (2008). Improving early language and literacy skills: Differential effects of an oral language versus a phonology with reading intervention. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49(4), 422-432.

92 Williams, D., & Coles, L. (2007). Teachers' approaches to finding and using research evidence: An information literacy perspective. *Educational research*, 49(2), 185-206.

St Mark's Church of England Primary School:

Embedding Vocabulary Teaching across the Curriculum

Research Team and Setting

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Background

St Mark's Church of England Primary School is a one-form primary school located in the London Borough of Lambeth which serves a diverse community: almost all pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has a transient school community and there are a large number of children from areas of social disadvantage. St Mark's also has a higher than average number of children who speak EAL and a higher than average number of children with SEND. When looking at the school data for children with SEND, Claire Moses (Inclusion Manager) identified that a large proportion of the children on the SEND register had primary difficulties in the area of SLCN. This is shown within government statistics which continue to emphasise how SLCN is the most prevalent area of SEND in mainstream primary schools.⁹³ Furthermore, Claire also identified that there appeared to be a large number of children entering the school with low levels of language and limited vocabulary.

Research has shown that the number of children entering school with low language levels can be up to 50% in areas of social disadvantage,⁹⁴ and research exploring the abilities of children entering nursery in socially disadvantaged areas found similar prevalence despite other general cognitive abilities being within the average range.⁹⁵ However, it is important to highlight that whilst a disproportionate number of children in socially disadvantaged areas experience language difficulties, there are also large numbers of children who do not.⁹⁶

Given the large number of children at the school identified with SLCN or low language levels, a priority area of focus for the SSLiC programme was to explore ways of increasing vocabulary. Furthermore, analysis of the initial SSLiC audit identified a number of strengths, although it was also identified that more could be done to monitor and develop language interventions. For example, across the school children received a daily intervention focusing on reading; however, the intervention was not working as effectively as it could for some children and therefore it was hoped that introducing a greater focus on vocabulary would strengthen the reading intervention. There is a wide range of literature which identifies how oral language skills are fundamental to the development of literacy skills, and oral language skills at 3 ½ influence word-reading

93 Department for Education. (2017). *Statistical First Release: Special Educational Needs in England*. DfE, London.

94 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000) Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.

95 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.

96 Law, J., Todd, L., Clark, J., Mroz, M., & Carr, J. (2013). *Early language delays in the UK*. Save the Children, London.

levels at 5 ½ and reading comprehension skills at 8 ½.⁹⁷ Furthermore, studies focusing on oral language interventions in the early years have been shown to have additional positive impacts on reading comprehension skills⁹⁸ and a number of research studies have identified the positive gains which can be made in children's oral language when interventions targeting pre-teaching and reinforcing vocabulary have been implemented.^{99, 100}

With this in mind, focusing on the Communication Supporting Classrooms domain of the audit, the SSLiC project at St Mark's aimed to support the use and understanding of vocabulary across the school to develop teaching and learning, with the goal that there were increased and explicit opportunities for all children to develop their vocabulary.

What was done?

As a key aim of the SSLiC project was to develop the use and understanding of vocabulary across the whole school, it was first necessary to ensure that teaching staff and support staff were aware of the

initiative and encouraged, and supported, to implement the change. Over the course of two staff meetings, staff were introduced to the SSLiC Programme, the CSCOT and the role of vocabulary in supporting language and literacy.

Prior to the introduction of additional strategies to promote vocabulary use, baseline measures were taken of the children's current language use. The school used Target Tracker as a means of monitoring children's progress and contained within this system were a number of targets focusing on children's spoken language. Table 4 shows the targets which were identified as a means of measuring children's progress across two years.

Using these targets, baseline measures for all children within Years 1 - 6 were taken, using a four-point scale (0,1,2,3) to illustrate their current achievement towards the target. Additionally, working in collaboration with the school's Speech and Language Therapist, an additional audit of the classroom environment was conducted.

Research has identified that developing practitioner skill in language and literacy

Table 4: Language targets for each year group

| Year Group | Target |
|----------------------|--|
| Years 1 and 2 | Can discuss his / her favourite words and phrases |
| Years 3 and 4 | Can compose and rehearse sentences orally (including dialogue), progressively building a varied rich vocabulary and an increasing range of sentence structure, in the context of paired, group, whole class work and across the curriculum |
| Years 5 and 6 | Asks specific reasoned questions to improve his / her understanding of vocabulary across the curriculum |

97 Hulme, C., Nash, H. M., Gooch, D., Lervåg, A., & Snowling, M. J. (2015). The foundations of literacy development in children at familial risk of dyslexia. *Psychological science*, 26(12), 1877-1886.

98 Fricke, S., Bowyer-Crane, C., Haley, A. J., Hulme, C., & Snowling, M. J. (2013). Efficacy of language intervention in the early years. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(3), 280-290.

99 Dyson, H., Solity, J., Best, W., & Hulme, C. (2018). Effectiveness of a small-group vocabulary intervention programme: evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *International journal of language & communication disorders*.

100 Bowyer-Crane, C., Snowling, M. J., Duff, F. J., Fieldsend, E., Carroll, J. M., Miles, J., ... & Hulme, C. (2008). Improving early language and literacy skills: Differential effects of an oral language versus a phonology with reading intervention. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49(4), 422-432.

interventions is more successful when additional ongoing support, such as coaching, is provided¹⁰¹ and positive gains have been found through the use of observational learning and feedback.¹⁰² With this mind, following the initial baseline measures and whole school training, in order to develop a collaborative approach to implementing the initiative, staff worked in pairs across the year groups.

In their learning pairs, staff worked together to complete peer observations using the Language Learning Environment and Language Learning Interactions dimensions of the CSCOT. Further, in order to embed vocabulary into the curriculum, each learning pair worked together to plan how they would incorporate a greater focus on vocabulary within both their lessons and the Teaching of Reading intervention. A range of approaches and resources were used, including a 'word of the week', introduction of key vocabulary, the use of concept maps and a range of materials from the Word Aware programme,¹⁰³ a resource for teaching vocabulary across the curriculum based on the Select, Teach, Activate and Review (STAR) process.¹⁰⁴

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The peer observations using the Language Learning Environment and Language Learning Interactions dimensions of the CSCOT identified that many of the features conducive to language rich learning environment were in place. For example, across the classrooms, there were clearly

defined learning areas, book specific areas and literacy specific areas.¹⁰⁵ When looking at the Language Learning Interactions, adults across the year groups appeared to frequently use a number of approaches when talking with children to develop their vocabulary, such as encouraging children to use new words in their own talking, asking open questions and modelling language the children are not using yet, techniques which are thought to lead to faster language acquisition.¹⁰⁶ There were fewer observed examples of using specific techniques such as scripting, labelling and extending. However, this resonates with literature which recognises that these techniques are often used less frequently in classrooms than would be hoped.¹⁰⁷

Following the implementation of a range of approaches to incorporate vocabulary into the curriculum, measures were taken on the progress children had made against the Target Tracker language statements. It was then possible to explore the children's progress based on the baseline and final assessment data. The results showed that all children made progress towards the language target. Figure 3 illustrates the average achievement within each class, made towards the language target, based on a four-point scale.

When looking at the graph, in Figure 3 it can be seen that the average achievement for pupils increased across all year groups. Furthermore, Figure 4 illustrates the difference in the average progress towards the language target for each year group.

As can be seen, there was a similar

101 Markussen-Brown, J., Juhl, C. B., Piasta, S. B., Bleses, D., Højen, A., & Justice, L. M. (2017). The effects of language-and literacy-focused professional development on early educators and children: A best-evidence meta-analysis. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 38*, 97-115.

102 Girolametto, L., Weitzman, E., & Greenberg, J. (2003). Training day care staff to facilitate children's language. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 32*(3), 299-311.

103 Parsons, S., & Branagan, A. (2017). *Word aware: Teaching vocabulary across the day, across the curriculum*. Routledge.

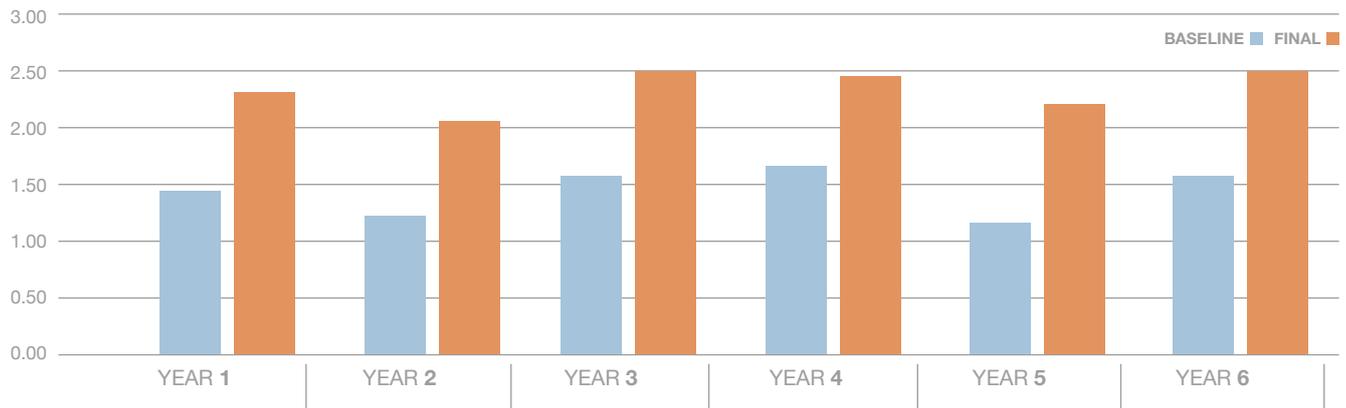
104 Blachowicz, C., & Fisher, P. J. (2014). *Teaching vocabulary in all classrooms*. Pearson Higher Ed.

105 Justice, L. M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 37*(2), 36-44.

106 Chapman, R. S. (2000). Children's language learning: An interactionist perspective. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 41*(1), 33-54.

107 Girolametto, L., Weitzman, E., & Greenberg, J. (2003). Training day care staff to facilitate children's language. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 12*(3), 299-311.

Figure 3: Average progress towards target by year group

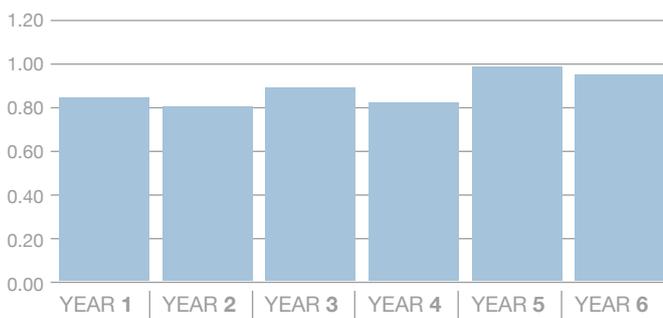


improvement across all year groups, with the biggest average difference between the baseline and final assessment measures being in Year 5, followed by Year 6. A further exploration as to the approaches and strategies used within these year groups will provide useful information as to what may have contributed to this and further support the learning of others.

Key Learning

There were a number of successes from this project, particularly in relation to staff professional development. For example, Claire described how the project had provided an opportunity for staff to work together on making whole-school change, and noted the benefits from staff working collaboratively in this way. Further, through emphasising the role of vocabulary in developing children's talk, and subsequent learning, a shared language and philosophy of language learning has begun to develop across the school, influencing the teaching approaches and opportunities children have to develop their vocabulary. However, as research suggests that vocabulary teaching needs to be sustained for three years,¹⁰⁸ the challenge will remain as to how to sustain the increased emphasis on vocabulary across the school.

Figure 4: Average difference in achievement by year group



108 Stahl, S. A., & Nagy, W. E. (2007). *Teaching word meanings*. London and New York: Routledge.

William Patten Primary School:

Bridging the Gap between Speech and Language Therapy and Classroom Practice

Research Team and Setting

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Kerryn Burn, Speech and Language Therapist, Children's Integrated SaLT Service for Hackney and the City

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Background

William Patten Primary School is a two-form entry primary school with a nursery provision, based in Stoke Newington, Hackney. The school serves a culturally and socially diverse community, with many children who have EAL. The school supports children with a range of SEND, and 30 children were identified with a primary need of SCLN.

The school works in collaboration with the Children's Integrated SaLT Service for Hackney and the City, and working within a traded model of service delivery, commissions one day a week of SaLT input. Much of the SaLT input focuses on direct work with individual children, outside of the classroom, and information provided to others is via written reports. Previous research has identified the challenges of SaLT input being provided through indirect work (often referred to as consultation); for example schools may feel deskilled

in delivering effective language-based interventions.¹⁰⁹ However, research has also suggested that positive gains can be made through using a consultation framework and through developing effective models of collaboration.¹¹⁰ Indeed, there was a desire amongst the project team for there to be greater collaboration between SaLT and teachers, for there to be more explicit links made between the SaLT input and classroom practice, and in keeping with the revised SEND Code of Practice,¹¹¹ to increase teacher responsibility for the progress of children with SCLN. Whilst this progressive move is encouraged, it is not without its challenges and teachers have raised concerns as to the obstacles in meeting the needs of children with language difficulties¹¹² and challenges with recognising language needs.¹¹³

Analysis from the initial SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit identified that there were many areas of work which were well developed or developing. However, the monitoring of intervention progress was an area identified as needing further development.

Previously, Caitlin Shaw (SENCO) had completed a whole-school initiative to develop the universal provision for children with SCLN and an additional aim of the SSLiC project was to further embed this work into practice and to increase the

109 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, N., Gascoigne, M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., & Band, S. (2002). Consultation as a model for providing speech and language therapy in schools: A panacea or one step too far? *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 18(2), 145-163.

110 Dockrell, J. E., Lindsay, G., Letchford, B., & Mackie, C. (2006). Educational provision for children with specific speech and language difficulties: perspectives of speech and language therapy service managers. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 41(4), 423-440.

111 Department for Education. (2015). Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years.

112 Dockrell, J. E., Howell, P., Leung, D., & Fugard, A. J. (2017, July). Children with speech language and communication needs in England: challenges for Practice. *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 2, p. 35). Frontiers.

113 Dockrell, J. E., & Hurry, J. (2018). The identification of speech and language problems in elementary school: Diagnosis and co-occurring needs. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*. 81, 52-64

awareness of language within the school.

With this in mind, the SSLiC project within William Patten Primary School aimed to increase teachers' understanding of strategies suggested within SLT reports and support their confidence in implementing the strategies. It also aimed to support teachers by increasing their familiarity and knowledge of the SaLT interventions, and to be able to apply this knowledge to monitor children's progress alongside applying this knowledge to target setting and parental feedback.

What was done?

Working together, Caitlin (SENCO) and Kerry (Speech and Language Therapist), firstly used the CSCOT¹¹⁴ to explore the similarities between the evidence-informed approaches identified in the Language Learning Interactions (LLI) Dimension of the CSCOT, and those strategies recommended in SLT reports. Once similar strategies and approaches had been identified, Caitlin and Kerry used the items in the CSCOT and SLT reports to inform ten key strategies with the aim of creating a common language which could be shared by teachers, support staff, children and parents, and ensure consistency across the school. Caitlin worked with a number of children to design a poster to encourage staff and children to use the identified strategies and the poster was displayed within all classrooms.

To further increase teacher knowledge of SaLT interventions, a staff meeting was led by Caitlin and Kerry which aimed to introduce teachers to the key terms used within SaLT report and the different SaLT interventions including those for children

with social communication difficulties, such as Zones of Regulation¹¹⁵ and Lego-Based Therapy.¹¹⁶ Teachers were given the opportunity to observe a SaLT intervention and, with permission, videos of SaLT input were recorded and made available to teaching staff.

In addition, to support teachers in setting meaningful targets on SEND support profiles (IEPs), Kerry developed summaries of her casework which included the targets they were working towards and recent progress that they had made within SaLT. These summaries were then shared with teaching staff, and Caitlin and Kerry worked with teachers to identify specific language targets to be monitored within the classroom and at home.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

Ten strategies to support children's talk were identified, and informed by items from the LLI Dimension of the CSCOT, and SaLT recommendations. Table 5 illustrates the relationship between the key strategies focused on within the project, and the relationship with the items in LLI.

114 Dockrell, J. E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S. & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool; Freely available from: https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf.

115 Kuypers, L. (2011). *The zones of regulation*. Think Social Publishing, San Jose.

116 Baron-Cohen, S., De La Cuesta, G. G., LeGoff, D. B., & Krauss, G. W. (2014). *LEGO®-Based Therapy: How to build social competence through LEGO®-Based Clubs for children with autism and related conditions*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Table 5: Ten key strategies to support TAL

| Key Strategy | Item(s) within the LLI which inform the strategy |
|------------------------------|---|
| Get our attention! | Adults use children’s names, draw attention of children. (LLI, Item 1) |
| Pace and Pause! | Pacing: Adult uses a slow pace during conversation; give children plenty of time to respond and take turns in interacting with them. (LLI, Item 5) Pausing: Adult pauses expectantly and frequently during interactions with children to encourage their turn-taking and active participation. (LLI, Item 6) |
| Whole Body Listening! | Children’s listening skills are praised (LLI, Item 19) |
| Scaffold Questions! | Open questioning: Adult asks open-ended questions that extend children’s thinking (what, where, when, how & why questions). (LLI, Item 13) Adult provides children with choices (for example: “Would you like to read a story or play on the computer?”). (LLI, Item 15) |
| Make it Visual! | Adults use symbols, pictures and props (real objects) to reinforce language. (LLI, Item 4) |
| Model Back! | Imitating: Adult imitates and repeats what child says more or less exactly. (LLI, Item 8) Adult models language that the children are not producing yet. (LLI, Item 17) Adult uses contrasts that highlight differences in lexical items and in syntactic structures. (LLI, Item 16) |
| Extend! | Extending: Adult repeats what child says and adds a small amount of syntactic or semantic information. (LLI, Item 10) |
| Vocabulary! | Adult encourages children to use new words in their own talking. (LLI, Item 12) Labelling: Adult provides the labels for familiar and unfamiliar actions, objects, or abstractions (e.g. feelings). (LLI, Item 11) |
| Provide a Script! | Scripting: Adult provides a routine to the child for representing an activity (e.g. First, you go up to the counter. Then you say “I want milk..”) and engages the child in known routines (e.g. “Now it is time for circle time. What do we do first?”). (LLI, Item 14) |
| Check Understanding! | Confirming: Adult responds to the majority of child utterances by confirming understanding of the child’s intentions. Adult does not ignore child’s communicative bids. (LLI, Item 5) |

The poster, designed by children of William Patten Primary School, used to highlight these strategies across the school is illustrated in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Support Talk Poster (Designed by pupils of William Patten Primary School)

The use of this poster has resulted in there being a shared understanding of and shared language for strategies which can be used to support talk. In addition, there have been a number of further outcomes that have arisen from the work carried out through introducing staff to SaLT interventions. Most notably, there has been greater collaboration between teachers, the SENCo and the Speech and Language Therapist. From a SaLT perspective, Kerryn described how there is a greater understanding from teachers as to the nature of the work she is undertaking when providing SaLT input. This has resulted in teachers beginning to be

able to incorporate specific language targets within Progress Reports. Further, Caitlin described how there are now opportunities for joint problem solving between teachers and Kerryn, developing a more collaborative approach to supporting children with SLCN at the school and developing an alternative model to using SaLT commissioned time within the school.

Key Learning

There were a number of successes highlighted throughout the project and an emerging model of collaborative working between professionals. There is evidence of greater understanding of the role of SaLT input and how support given through SaLT interventions could be replicated and applied within the classroom. Further, the use of the CSCOT to inform applicable strategies to support talk within the classroom strengthens the feasibility of the tool as a universal intervention to promote oral language.¹¹⁷ Challenges continue as to how to further embed this practice, as constraints on SaLT and teacher time were highlighted, and this can be a major barrier to collaborative working.¹¹⁸ Further, such barriers to sustaining change can lead to uncomfortable feelings which may result in an implementation dip and a reversal back to more familiar, comfortable working practices.¹¹⁹ However, through continuing to develop a shared language of support and through gaining further evidence of how SaLT input can be applied within the classroom setting, and the positive outcomes that can arise from SaLTs providing more frequent in-direct work, this can generate a powerful force for change.

117 Dockrell, J. E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 271-286.

118 Hartas, D. (2004). Teacher and speech-language therapist collaboration: Being equal and achieving a common goal?. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 20(1), 33-54.

119 Fullan, M. (2014). *Leading in a culture of change personal action guide and workbook*. John Wiley & Sons.

Woodmansterne Primary School:

Describing and supporting children's SLCN and carefully monitoring progression in language interventions

Research Team and Setting

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Background

Woodmansterne Primary is a popular, over-subscribed and expanding Lambeth school with a separate nursery on the borders of Merton and Croydon in London. In September 2017, the school became an all through school and welcomed its first Year 7 students. The school strives to work in partnership with a diverse community with a very high percentage of the school population speaking EAL (59.6%).

A key priority for the school was the need to ensure that there are effective systems in place to select and monitor targeted interventions and subsequently evaluate the impact these are having on outcomes. Research suggests an unsystematic approach to supporting children's SLCN in schools, particularly around the use of

interventions.¹²⁰ Inconsistencies in selecting and using interventions can be particularly problematic in effectively supporting SLCN as this results in issues as to the effective monitoring and evaluation of interventions and, ultimately, ensuring access to the most appropriate support. Constraints on SaLT time in schools have implications for the identification and support of SLCN, and therefore monitoring interventions was a key area of work for the SSLiC Woodmansterne Project.

In addition to this, there was a big drive from the school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to involve all adults working with children and ensure that everyone is aware of children's needs and their targets and can provide appropriate support. An essential element of a communication supporting school is to ensure the quality of adult – child interactions and the ways in which language is used in the classroom.¹²¹ The importance of the adult role is well documented in research^{122, 123} although there are also concerns expressed about lack of consistency within the school environment in how support staff use language learning interaction techniques. A further focus of the SSLiC Woodmansterne Project was a desire to increase opportunities to support

120 Roulstone, S., Wren, Y., Bakopoulou, I., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Interventions for children with speech, language and communication needs: An exploration of current practice. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 28(3), 325-341.

121 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

122 Hoff, E. (2003). The specificity of environmental influence: Socioeconomic status affects early vocabulary development via maternal speech. *Child Development*, 74, 1368-1378.

123 Desforjes, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review*. DfES, Nottingham.

parents with implementing language learning strategies and raising the importance of providing language learning opportunities at home. Parental involvement to support a child at home has been shown to have positive educational benefits.^{124, 125, 126}

Further, the key role of the home learning environment, particularly in the early years, in supporting language development is well documented.¹²⁷ The school acknowledged that some parents would welcome additional advice and guidance on how to support their child's language development at home and that there may be a number of factors contributing to how able they may feel in seeking support in that regard from others.¹²⁸

Kate and Rena completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit and discussed it in their SaLT meeting. An analysis of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit revealed that most domains were being developed already. For example, all teaching staff and assistants demonstrate an understanding of language development and how SLCN can be supported. However, there was an acknowledgement that, although key members of staff undertake professional development activities focusing on communication, they do not always cascade these skills on to other members of staff and there are not regular mentoring opportunities and peer observation in place

to support good quality practice in relation to children's language development. Research has highlighted the benefits of moving away from models of professional development for school professionals which rely on courses and workshop events, towards more individual-focused, school- and practitioner-led approaches,^{129, 130} but also using observational learning¹³¹ and feedback^{132,133} to effect changes to teaching practice and support practitioners in developing ways of talking with children to enhance their oral language. In addition, although in termly Pupil Progress Review (PPR) meetings, teachers and the SENCo would identify where children are not making expected progress, there was a need for a systematic and clear way to monitor the progress children with identified SLCN are making through their involvement in language interventions. Related to this, Kate and Rena identified that One Page Profiles need to be in place for this group of children to ensure all staff are aware of a child's strengths and areas of need.

In addition, six classes in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 were observed using the CSCOT.¹³⁴ Areas for development were identified and these included alterations to the Language Learning Classroom environments. In particular, the Woodmansterne Communication Team

124 Desforges, C., & Abouchar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review*. DFES, Nottingham.

125 Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational psychology review*, 13(1), 1-22.

126 Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2007). Engaging parents in raising achievement do parents know they matter? : A research project commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Research report (Great Britain Department for Children, Schools and Families) DCSF-RW004. from <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6639/>.

127 Sénéchal, M. and LeFevre, J.-A. (2002), involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 73: 445-460.

128 Skeat, J., Eadie, P., Ukoumunne, O. and Reilly, S. (2010), Predictors of parents seeking help or advice about children's communication development in the early years. *Child Care, Health and Development*, 36: 878-887.

129 Knight, P., & Trowler, P. (2001). *Departmental leadership in higher education*. McGraw-Hill Education, UK.

130 Harland, J., & Kinder, K. (1997). Teachers' continuing professional development: Framing a model of outcomes. *British Journal of In-Service Education*, 23(1), 71-84.

131 Ezell, H.K., & Justice, L.M. (2000). Increasing print focus of adult-child shared book reading through observational learning. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 12(3), 299-311.

132 Myers, D.M., Simonsen, B., & Sugai, G. (2011). Increasing teachers' use of praise with a response-to-intervention approach. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 34(1), 35-59.

133 Coddling, R.S., Feinberg, A.B., Dunn, E.K., & pace, G.M. (2005). Effects of immediate performance feedback on implementation of behaviour support plans. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 38(2), 205-219.

134 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf.

felt that classroom displays did not always invite comments from children, the range of books offered was limited and that the books were not available in other learning areas (particularly non-fiction books).

What was done?

In order to support change across the school, a Communication Team was set up including the school's Head Teacher, the Assistant Head Teacher, the Nursery teacher and the school's Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) with a specialism in language and communication. The SSLiC Woodmansterne project aimed:

To develop stronger language learning environments

Based on the results of the CSCOT, the Woodmansterne Communication Team chose to focus work on book corners and classroom displays to ensure consistency of language and communication work throughout EYFS and Key Stage 1. The school's Reading Coordinator led an INSET for all members of the EYFS and KS1 on the importance of book reading for children's oral language. The class teachers, along with classroom support staff, were given time and resources to improve these in their classrooms. A systematic approach was adopted in that repeated observations using the CSCOT focusing on the Language Learning Environment dimension were conducted.

To better describe and identify children's SLCN and carefully monitor children's progress through the involvement in language interventions

One Page Profiles for all children with

identified needs in EYFS and KS1 were developed capturing all the important information about a child, their strengths and the best way to support them. One Page Profiles provide the platform for sharing information across staff but also a person-centred record that can move with the child as they transition to higher classes. These are now regularly discussed with all school staff involved in PPR meetings and shared with outside professionals and parents and updated to reflect children's changing needs as a way of monitoring interventions.

To increase opportunities to support parents and carers with implementing language learning strategies and raising the importance of providing language learning opportunities at home

As part of the work to promote parents' engagement and improve access to book reading, the Woodmansterne Early Years Team run a number of workshops for parents on the importance of reading with their child. During these sessions, staff highlighted the benefits of book reading and modelled techniques on how to make reading more interactive in order to support oral language development.^{135,136} These were received very well by all parents attending the workshops.

What were the findings of the project?

There are a number of findings across the different areas of work completed as part of the SSLiC Woodmansterne Project. First of all, there is strong evidence in the school of increased staff awareness of the importance of oral language. The profile of SSLiC Woodmansterne project is raised within the school and is often being talked

135 Justice, L.M., Kaderavek, J.N., Fan, X., Sofka, A., & Hunt, A. (2009). Accelerating preschoolers' early literacy development through classroom based teacher-child storybook reading and explicit print referencing. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, 40(1), 67-85.

136 Mol, S., Bus, A., & de Jong, M. (2009). Interactive book reading in early education: A tool to stimulate print knowledge as well as oral language. *Review of Educational Research*, 79, 979-1007.

about and linked with other professional development (for example, Helicopter Stories). Work undertaken as part of the SSLiC Woodmansterne Project by members of staff is now also being linked to staff appraisals, raising the profile of the SSLiC Woodmansterne Project even more and highlighting that the development of oral language is a key priority for the school.

One of the main outcomes from the SSLiC Woodmansterne project also relates to school staff demonstrating an increased awareness of how to modify the language learning environment to support children's oral language. Interactive displays and well-organised book corners are now embedded in practice and used consistently across classes. This is intended to support pupils, particularly children in the EYFS transitioning into Year 1, as they progress through school, addressing issues of variability amongst classroom environments often reported in research.¹³⁷

Furthermore, through the use of One Page Profiles, all staff working with children with identified SLCN now have a better understanding of children's needs and interventions provided. This has important positive implications given research which has shown that teachers can feel unprepared and lack the skill and confidence in identifying¹³⁸ and supporting children's language needs.¹³⁹

Moving forward, the Woodmansterne Communication Team plan to deliver a whole-school INSET at the beginning of the 2018/19 academic year in order to share the findings of the SSLiC project and continue to

embed CPD by highlighting the importance of oral language. The findings of the SSLiC Woodmansterne project will also be shared with the SLT and the KS2 leaders with the hope of cascading and further embedding the work but also ensuring consistency between KS1 and KS2, and linking the SSLiC Action Plan to the 2018/2019 school improvement plan.

Finally, there are plans to continue including communication support to the workshops offered to parents with the hope of further promoting parental involvement with their child's education and also improving their confidence to communicate with their child.



137 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Developing a communication supporting classrooms observation tool. London: Department for Education <https://www.gov.uk/publications/developing-a-communication-supporting-classrooms-observation-tool>.

138 Dockrell, J.E., & Hurry, J. (2018). The identification of speech and language problems in elementary school: Diagnosis and co-occurring needs. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*.

139 Dockrell, J.E., Howell, P., Leung, D., & Fugard, A.J. (2017). Children with speech, language and communication needs in England: challenges for practice. *Frontiers in Education*, 2, 35.

Key learning

For professionals leading the Woodmansterne SSLiC project, knowing about and using the available research into the development of oral language was absolutely key in effecting change in school policy and practice. To support the development of a more evidence-informed teaching practice, there needs to be a real focus on enabling teacher capacity to engage in and with research,¹⁴⁰ and that was clearly demonstrated throughout the SSLiC Woodmansterne project. The revised SEND Code of Practice¹⁴¹ places a great emphasis on increasing teacher responsibility for the progress of children with SLCN, and this can only be achieved with greater staff awareness of the importance of oral language and their role in supporting it. From here on, continuing to use the research evidence in the long term and embedding it with school policy will undoubtedly remain a big challenge, but one that is proven to effect lasting change and contribute to expanding and strengthening the evidence base.¹⁴²

The final important key learning point from the SSLiC Woodmansterne Project was that support of oral language often feels slotted into the day-to-day school tasks because it is not assessed beyond the early years. In order for this to change, the importance of communication needs to be championed throughout the school and actions related to the improvement of communication outcomes for children need to be prioritised as part of the school's ongoing school improvement plan.^{143,144} In that way, policy and practice that reflects the importance of communication can be embedded within the school and beyond the early years.



140 Brown, C., & Zhang, D. (2016). How Can School Leaders Establish Evidence informed Schools: An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Potential School Policy Levers. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. 45(3), 382-401.

141 Department for Education (2015). Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years.

142 Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Buckler, N., Coles-Jordan, D., Crisp, B., Saunders, L., Coe, R. (2015). Developing Great Teaching: Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development. Teacher Development Trust.

143 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36-44.

144 Kotter, J.P. (2012). *Leading Change*. Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, Mass.

Wyvil Primary School:

Improving and increasing opportunities for good quality spoken interaction within the classroom

Research Team and Setting

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Background

Wyvil Primary School and Centre for Children with Speech and Language Impairment and Autism is a two-form entry school with 526 pupils on roll. The school population is challenging in many ways – a significantly higher than the national average percentage of pupils receive Free School Meals (47.6%), are from Minority Ethnic Groups (96.5%), have EAL (72%) and have SEN (37.8%), including SCLN.

There was an acknowledgement by Nicola and Jess that a high percentage of children start school with a low level of language, a pattern identified repeatedly by research demonstrating that the number of children entering school with low language levels can be up to 50% in areas of social disadvantage.¹⁴⁵ This finding is consistently reported even when children's other general cognitive abilities are within the average

range.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, a key rationale for the Wyvil SSLiC project was to promote high quality teaching to develop the language skills for all children, based on extensive research suggesting that if schools provide environments which are conducive for effective language learning then the numbers of children identified as experiencing SLCN should reduce.¹⁴⁷

Nicola and Jess completed the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit and discussed it in phases and with all school's subject leaders. In addition, observations in classes using the CSCOT¹⁴⁸ were conducted to profile the language learning environments and gather more information about existing good practice and areas for development. An analysis of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit and the completed CSCOT revealed that, due to the high percentage of children with EAL and SEND, in many ways the school was already doing a lot to support the development of spoken language. Therefore, it was agreed that promoting and improving spoken language in the classroom is an established school priority.

Nevertheless, there were some areas that needed developing. For example, Nicola and Jess identified areas for development within the Communication Supporting Classroom domain of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit, with a particular focus on

145 Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, P., Gascoigne M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., Band, S., and Fitzgerald, L. (2000). Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services. DfES research report 23.

146 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37(1), 3-15.

147 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

148 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool. Freely available from: https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/93866/tct_bcrp_csc_final.pdf.

the need to improve the language learning environments, provide more language learning opportunities and further monitor language learning interactions. Keeping in mind the importance of the language learning environment as a context where children have regular access to high quality language learning experiences^{149,150} the Wyvil SSLiC project focused its work on more free play opportunities and resources in EYFS and KS1.¹⁵¹ There were also areas for development in relation to increasing the opportunities to engage in structured conversations with adults and peers^{152,153} as well as more use of open questioning¹⁵⁴ and vocabulary learning.

Further, there were a number of items within the Staff Professional Development and Learning domain of the SSLiC Self-Assessment School Audit that were identified as needing development. These related to the need to more regularly monitor the qualifications and skill level of all staff in relation to children's language and communication development and provide more opportunities for mentoring to support good quality practice.

Finally, the active participation and support of parents is encouraged at Wyvil Primary and therefore further work on providing advice and guidance on how to support language development at home was considered an important part of the SSLiC Wyvil Project.

What was done?

In order to support change across the school, a Communication Team was set up

and a number of actions were carried out:

Improving classroom environments to support oral language

Following classroom observations in EYFS and Key Stage 1 using the CSCOT, school staff focused their efforts on improving classroom displays to include children's work and make them more interactive ensuring that child's voice is reflected. This work has been in accordance with the Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA), a UNICEF project which has been running at Wyvil Primary for the last two years. RRSA places great emphasis on the importance of children being made aware of their rights and ensuring the child's voice is shared and reflected throughout the school life.

Further improvements in the classroom environments took the form of improving the classrooms' table top displays and revising the range of books on offer as well as the range of resources and toys available to children. Staff were given time to make the necessary changes to their classroom displays as well as reorganising their existing resources.

Improving and increasing opportunities within the classroom for spoken interactions

Firstly, the Wyvil Communication Team worked collaboratively to improve and increase opportunities for free and structured talk. This was achieved through an increase in the opportunities within the classroom when the expectation was on promoting talk between students and staff, and where staff can scaffold and extend children's spoken interactions. The school has embraced and uses P4C (Philosophy for Children), a proven

149 Justice, L.M., Mashburn, A.J., Harare, B.K., & Pianta, R.C. (2008). Quality of language and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms serving at-risk pupils. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 51-68.

150 Justice, L.M. (2004). Creating language-rich preschool classroom environments. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37, 3-44.

151 Smith, M. W., & Dickinson, D.K. (1994). Describing oral language opportunities and environments in Head Start and other preschool classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 9, 345-366.

152 Mashburn, A. J., Justice, L. M., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C. (2009). Peer effects on children's language achievement during pre-kindergarten. *Child Development*, 80(3), 686-702.

153 Justice, L.M., Petscher, Y., Schatschneider, C., & Mashburn, A. (2011). Peer effects in preschool classrooms: Is children's language growth associated with their classmates' skills? *Child Development*, 82(6), 1768-1777.

154 Cabell, S.Q., Justice, L.M., Piasta, S.B., Cumenton, S.M., Wiggins, A., Turnbull, K.P., & Petscher, Y. (2011). The impact of teacher responsiveness education on preschoolers' language and literacy skills. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 20(4), 315-330.

enquiry-based pedagogy where children are taught how to create their own philosophical questions, which linked well as a target with an increase in the opportunities children have for spoken interactions within the classroom.

In addition, the Wyvil Communication Team worked on improving the effectiveness of Talking Partners across the school and increasing pupil participation in class discussion. Time was given in all lessons to rehearse responses with a partner in order to ensure that children are able and have the skills to participate more. In addition, efforts were made to capture and evidence this pupil talk with the use of PENpal recording devices and videos in order to reinforce the use of spoken language and increase pupils' confidence in participating in whole-class discussions.

Developing interactions to extend children's language

Alongside providing increased opportunities for spoken interactions, the quality of the interactions was developed to promote and extend children's language. This was achieved through a focus on the professional development of staff alongside developing the classroom environment and providing additional resources for children to use.

To support staff in developing and extending their spoken interactions, great emphasis was placed on staff receiving additional training focusing on language modelling. Peer observations were a big part of the Wyvil SSLiC project with an emphasis on breaking down the barriers to observe peers and allowing time to reflect afterwards on teaching strengths and areas for further development. Research has demonstrated the supportive role of observation tools that can provide a framework to structure

feedback and encourage discussion about the classroom practice.¹⁵⁵ The Wyvil SSLiC project aimed to provide systematic, continued support for professional development: observational learning was a big part of that alongside feedback around these observations which supported school staff in developing ways of talking with children in order to enhance their oral language.¹⁵⁶

The Wyvil Communication Team also worked together, along with their class teams, to develop their own practice and identify specific language learning interaction strategies for enhancing the quality of their talk with children. They utilised the LLI dimension of the CSCOT to observe and monitor their interactions and adapted this to focus more succinctly on the items related to extending talk. Specifically, they chose to focus the work on two strategies; firstly, on increasing vocabulary learning and secondly on improving the use of open questions used by class teachers.

An increase of vocabulary learning was achieved with staff modelling as well as regular reference to the newly established classroom interactive displays and work across the different phases on synonyms. In addition, weekly Makaton teaching from the Makaton lead in school took place during whole staff meetings where school staff learnt new signs every week. In terms of use of open questions, further training was provided as part of the joint federation staff meetings focusing on questioning, and then peer observations and filming of teaching sessions were used to provide specific feedback and further support staff.

Increasing parents' confidence in communicating with their child

The Wyvil Communication Team gave out

155 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

156 Myers, D.M., Simonsen, B., & Sugai, G. (2011). Increasing teachers' use of praise with a response-to-intervention approach. *Education and treatment of children*, 34(1), 35-59.

topic word banks to parents at the beginning of each term in order to engage parents with what is being discussed and learnt at school but also to support them with ideas of how to communicate more with their children. In addition, a number of Parents' Events were organised where the role of language and communication was highlighted, and one parent workshop was organised with a specific focus on children's language and communication.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

There is very strong evidence that the SSLiC Wyvil Project has been successful with a reported increase in the EYFS profile scores in the area of Language and Communication by 12% this year.

The main outcome of the work undertaken on developing stronger communication-supporting classrooms is improved classroom environments in the EYFS and Key Stage 1. This has important positive implications for the pupils as they progress through the school and particularly as those children in Nursery and Reception classes transition into Year 1. Research has highlighted large variability amongst classroom environments, with many of the features conducive to an effective language learning environment not present in most Key Stage 1 classrooms.¹⁵⁷

Another important finding of the SSLiC Wyvil project relates to a significant increase in students participating and sharing their ideas during whole-class discussions reported in lesson observations. It was evident that the use of open questions by teachers, with time given to think about their answer using the vocabulary and sentence starters provided,

and time given to rehearse responses with a partner, generated a significantly higher percentage of children who are willing to contribute orally in class. This finding has been supported by a number of studies identifying the positive gains which can be made to children's oral language when interventions target pre-teaching and reinforcing vocabulary.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, lesson observations measuring the quality of children's spoken language showed that there was a significant increase in the number of children giving an answer to a question of 16 words or more, with an increase in the children's ability to form grammatically correct sentences.

A key outcome of the Wyvil SSLiC Project was the increased staff awareness, and recognition of the importance of a communication-supporting classroom. School staff are on board and have embraced a key philosophy of language learning which, in the case of Wyvil Primary, relates to the importance of the adult role in supporting children's oral language.

In terms of the work undertaken to increase parental confidence in communicating with their child, the feedback following the Parents' Events and workshops has been positive, but improving the quality of spoken language at home remains a challenge.

Moving forward, the Wyvil Communication Team plans to continue the cycle of regularly using the CSCOT to audit the classroom environments as well as supporting staff professional development. In addition, Nicola and Jess plan to set out expectations of how language learning environments ought to be structured and what is good practice for planning for language learning opportunities at the beginning of September to all staff

157 Dockrell, J.E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2015). Capturing communication supporting classrooms: The development of a tool and feasibility study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(3), 1-16.

158 Dyson, H., Solity, J., Best, W., & Hulme, C. (2018). Effectiveness of a small-group vocabulary intervention programme: evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 53, 947-958

throughout the school. Peer observations will continue to be part of a rolling cycle with a focus on use of language learning interaction techniques and improvements on the classroom environments.

Key learning

The Wyvil SSLiC Project has demonstrated that conversations between adults and children that are characterised by high quality language learning interactions are the core of the communication-supporting school environment. Good modelling and interesting talking topics are powerful techniques, as is consistency in this approach from all staff to ensure all interactions are of high quality. School staff at Wyvil Primary report marked improvements in lesson planning and this was attributed to careful and precise planning to teach specific elements of language, carefully modelling them for students and allowing them time to rehearse and practise.

This project has also demonstrated that having high standards and adopting a systematic and thorough approach when addressing spoken language at a school level is key when the aim is to effect whole-school changes and support the oral language of all students, not only the ones with identified SLCN. Underpinning the project has been the process of using a robust and repeatable audit and observation tool as a means for staff professional development, recognising areas for personal and school development and implementing specific changes to address the development areas. Using evidence-based approaches can give a solid basis on which to build improvements and inform future good practice. The challenge now will be on how to maintain the process and sustain the improvements over time.



Conclusion

The participants in the SSLiC programme implemented a variety of changes in their schools at pupil, practitioner and school levels. At the pupil level, initiatives included a more tailored and individualised support of identified SLCN. At practitioner and school levels, some of the participants used the SSLiC programme as a springboard in their school to enhance staff understanding of language development, further support professional development and effect systemic school changes in assessing and identifying language needs as well as working collaboratively with parents and external professionals. Ultimately, all

participants reported that they used the SSLiC programme to raise the profile of the importance of oral language for children's educational attainment. One of the aims of the SSLiC programme is to continue to support developments in practice after the programme has ended through ongoing review of the self-assessment audit and action plan. All of the schools in the SSLiC programme have continued with their focus on the projects described in this publication and in doing so are ensuring that their work contributes to the wider evidence base for supporting pupils with SLCN.



Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom (SSLiC) is a knowledge exchange programme that aims to support the development of practice in schools and to expand the evidence base to ultimately improve outcomes for children with speech, language and communication needs.

For further information on the programme please contact:

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