UCL

Supporting Spoken Language in the Classroom (SSLiC)

Knowledge Exchange Programme

SSLiC Programme adapted for The Cambridge Primary Education Trust 2021

Institute of Education

Authors

Gill Brackenbury, UCL Centre for Inclusive Education

Rosanne Esposito, UCL Centre for Inclusive Education

Dr Roberto Filippi, Psychology and Human Development, UCL Institute of Education

Acknowledgments

Institute of Education

Contents

Overview

- Introduction
- Scope of the project
- Classroom Observation Tool highlights
- 4 Case-studies:
    1. Histon and Impington Infant School: Supporting staff in developing effective communication strategies with children

    2. Trumpington Park Primary: Supporting parents to better understand the journey of communication and help them engage with their children at home

    3. Hatton Park Primary: Working more collaboratively with parents to support their involvement in promoting language opportunities at home

    4. Somersham Primary: A whole-school approach to improving language and vocabulary Histon and Impington Infant School

- Conclusions

Introduction

What is SSLiC

SSLiC is a knowledge exchange programme that 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 growing evidence base in the area of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), although there are still major 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 existing evidence base related to communication and oral language can be applied to settings 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 their professional development and learning: i) Language Leadership ii) Staff Professional Development and Learning iii) Communication Supporting Classrooms iv) Identifying and Supporting Speech, Language and Communication Needs v) Working with Others.

The Cambridge Primary Education Trust (CPET)

Cambridge Primary Education Trust (CPET) was formed in 2012 and is comprised of five primary schools: Histon & Impington Junior School, Histon & Impington Infant School, Hatton Park Primary School in Longstanton, Trumpington Park Primary School in Cambridge and Somersham Primary School (which joined in April 2019). The schools serve a variety of pupil needs and the trust is committed to providing an inclusive offer across the whole school community. CPET has 230 staff, an annual income of about £8 million (plus other income streams) and has been supporting over 2000 pupils from Sept 2019.

All CPET schools are central to the life of their local community, providing every pupil with the opportunity not just to receive an excellent primary education, but to begin to understand how healthy communities can flourish when each person plays an active part in serving others.

CPET places considerable emphasis on recruiting and investing in excellent teachers and staff, providing opportunities for development and promotion within their schools. They recently obtained a National Teaching School status. Through this status all CPET teachers are given unrivalled opportunities for professional and career development. Collaboration and cross-school working leads to an enriched educational experience for children in CPET schools and beyond.

Executive Principal, Lesley Birch, plays a leading role regionally in the self-improving school led system. She is the East of England representative on the National Teaching Schools Council, seeking

to raise attainment across the region. She approached UCL Institute of Education (IOE) and expressed her concern about the negative impact of Covid-19 on the language development of Early Years pupils.

The Trust works in collaboration with a variety of other Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) across the region and through the Teaching School it has very strong networks locally and regionally.

SSLiC: A Knowledge Exchange partnership

Background to knowledge exchange

The 'research to practice' gap has long been acknowledged in education and the social sciences more generally. A survey of 484 policy makers and practitioners, across different social sciences, reported that just 35% of the respondents frequently used university research, despite it being one of the most trusted sources (McCormick et al., 2013). In response to such a context, within education at a national level, there have been a number of initiatives, such as the launch of the Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit (EEF, 2014) to support the development of a more evidence informed teaching profession. Recent studies have also highlighted the key factors that school leaders need to consider, such as enabling teacher capacity to engage in and with research, if they wish to establish more evidenced informed practice in schools (Brown & Zhang, 2016; Williams & Cole, 2007) as well as empowering teachers to support children with identified needs in areas where they particularly feel unprepared and lack the skill and confidence to address the needs of children with language and communication difficulties (Dockrell, Howell, Leung, & Fugard, 2017). However, understanding and then addressing the challenges of the 'research to practice' gap in all professions including education, social care and health, demands that all relevant groups, including researchers, practitioners and policy makers consider their role and contribution to this challenge.

What is Knowledge Exchange?

Knowledge Exchange (KE) is a process which brings together researchers in universities and users of research in schools and wider groups to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise in order to address specific issues in education. In this case, the area of focus is spoken language in the classroom. Central to the concept of KE is the bi-directional pathway between academic research and school practice. This bi-directional pathway is illustrated by the need for:

- consensus between practitioners and researchers about the sort of evidence needed for the classroom and not just by the researcher
- interaction between the tacit knowledge of the practitioner and the explicit knowledge of the researcher to create more meaningful evidence for the classroom
- more intense and long term relationships between practitioners and researchers to ensure that research is more likely to be used in the long term and is embedded with school policy
- accumulated knowledge of a field rather than outputs of a single study (Schucksmith, 2016).

Many of the features of KE share principles in common with more effective continuing professional development and learning (CPDL) programmes in schools. Lessons from international reviews into effective professional development repeatedly described the importance of CPDL that had a focus on pupil outcomes, lasted for at least two terms, used outside expertise to support the programme, along with external facilitators acting as coaches and mentors (Cordingley *et al*. 2015).

How is SSLiC a Knowledge Exchange programme?

The philosophy and structure of the SSLiC programme combines both the ethos and practice of effective KE and CPDL.

The programme lasts for eight months and begins with participants, who are drawn from small teams working in schools, being introduced to:

- the evidence base available for supporting spoken language in Primary Schools

- an evidence informed audit, written by the authors of the present Handbook, to enable participants to identify their current strengths and areas for development

- KE and its benefits for ensuring lasting change in schools and expanding and strengthening the evidence base.

Over the next months, with the support of a facilitator, who is a member of the SSLiC UCL team, participants identify changes they consider relevant for their settings based on the results of the SSLiC Self-assessment School Improvement Audit and quite often studies they have read which have excited their interest and offer potential for improving outcomes for pupils in their settings. Research has identified that developing practitioner skill in language and literacy interventions is more successful when additional ongoing support, such as coaching, is provided (Markussen-Brown et al., 2017). At the end of the eight months, a review day is held for all participants with the SSLiC research team, during which observations and findings are shared.

What distinguishes the SSLiC programme as a KE programme, and not just evidence informed CPDL, is the bi-directional nature of the collaboration throughout. The emphasis on the importance of longevity of working relationships is continued with the opportunity for programme participants to continue their involvement through a series of networks. The SSLiC programme focuses on supporting participating schools in continuing to use the research evidence in the long term and embedding it with school policy to effect lasting change and contribute to expanding and strengthening the evidence base (Cordingley et al., 2015). In this way, not only is the evidence base enriched and informed by practitioners, but there is a greater chance of the projects in schools not being one of the 65% of changes in any organisation that fail to deliver or maintain momentum (NCLSCS, 2009).

Scope of the project

SSLiC aims to foster an effective language learning environment, and so provide support for literacy and learning to underpin 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 in their relationships with peers, and can reduce the number of children experiencing learning and communication difficulties.

Project phases
The project started in March 2021 and ended in July 2021. It consisted of 4 main phases:

1)   SSLiC Professional Learning

2)   Classroom Observations

3)   School audit, analysis and action plan

4)   Progress review, facilitation sessions and sharing learning journey

School Project lead
Ms Charlotte Leaver of Trumpington Primary acted as CPET project leader.

Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool highlights

Background
The Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (freely available at The Communication Trust's website) should be used to first of all identify strengths and areas for development within the classroom. Based on the outcome of this, suggestions are highlighted to further implement a Communication Supporting Classroom.

What was done

Observations took place from the 19th to the 29th of April 2021. Each school was visited by Roberto Filippi in the first hour of the morning. This activity is based on the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT) (Dockrell, Bakopoulou, Law, Spencer, & Lindsay, 2015) which consists of three domains of language learning:

1) Language Learning Environment

The physical environment of a classroom has a coercive power over the quality and the quantity of children's oral language experiences (Roskos & Neuman, 2002). The classroom language learning environment mediates the language that the teachers and children use when they interact. In creating communication supporting environments, the physical environment can provide ample support for facilitating children's exposure to diverse aspects of language content, form and use. Many of the items within a good quality language learning environment are static and are the infrastructure to support language learning (Dockrell, Bakopoulou, Law, Spencer, & Lindsay, 2012; Dockrell, Bakopoulou, Law, Spencer, & Lindsay, 2015).

2) Language Learning Opportunities.

Language Learning Opportunities refer to the structured opportunities that are present in the setting to support children's language development. Providing structured language learning opportunities is necessary to ensure an intentional and deliberate focus on language learning in the classroom (Bunce, 1995; Justice, 2004).

3) Language Learning Interactions.

An essential element of a communication supporting classroom is to ensure the quality of adult-child interactions and the ways in which language is used in the classroom. A social-interactive perspective of language acquisition emphasizes the importance of frequent, well-tuned communicative interactions in children's achievement of language content, use and form (Chapman, 2000). Variations of the quality and the quantity that children experience in their homes and their classrooms partially account for individual differences in the rate of children's language accomplishments (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Hoff, 2003). A communication supporting classroom environment thus must involve adults who deliberately use language-stimulation strategies when conversing with children (Law et al., 2017). Without adult-child conversations of sufficiently high quality and sensitivity, efforts to change the physical environment and provide language learning opportunities are not likely to result in the desired child language outcomes (Dockrell, Bakopoulou, Law, Spencer, & Lindsay, 2015).

Four Case-studies

1. Histon and Impington Infant School
Supporting staff in developing effective communication strategies with children

Research Team and Setting

Mr Jonathan Newman – Head teacher jnewman@cptrust.co.uk

Ms Emily Stevenson Early Years Lead – estevenson@cpetrust.co.uk

Ms Laura Goller - EYFS Leader - lgoller@cpetrust.co.uk

Ms Lucy Huntington - Class teacher LHuntington@cpetrust.co.uk

Ms Hannah Scheilling Class teacher hscheilling@cpetrust.co.uk

Ms Mandy Robinson - Class teacher - mrobinson@cpetrust.co.uk

Dr Roberto Filippi, SSLiC Facilitator, and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Human Development, UCL Institute of Education

Background

The Histon & Impington Infant school is a well-established and high performing school for Reception and KS1. Since January 2021, the school relocated to a new building and converted to a 4-11 years' primary school due to the growing population in the village.

The main priority for change was to support all staff in developing effective communication strategies with children, with particular focus on the use of open-ended questions, modelling new language and quality interactions.

With such focus in mind, they felt it was important to ensure that all adults feel confident in knowing how to support children's communication and language within the context of a reception classroom. This has also been a good way to introduce the staff working in Reception class to the importance of establishing high-quality interactions with children and that these should be at the forefront of everyday educational practice in early years setting.

The initial SSLiC Self-Assessment Audit highlighted a number of developed practices in identifying and supporting children with special language and communication needs (SLCN).

Due to good communication with feeder preschools, SLCN is often identified before children enter Reception and their progress is monitored regularly through both formative and summative assessments. However, the Audit identified other areas in which development will be required, particularly in the areas of language leadership and staff professional development and learning.

The results from the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT) identified many strengths in all domains and in all four early year classes. The learning environment setting was optimal for effective learning (Figure 1), children were engaged in structured conversations and the quality of interaction between teachers, teaching assistants and children was generally of good quality.

Some other areas of development were also identified. For example, it was noted that children did not have opportunities to choose activities or engage in interactive book reading. It was also noted a lack of interaction with male teachers or teaching assistants, which are not employed in early years – a common issue within CPET due to a lack of male applicants.

Figure 1 – One of the EY classrooms at the Histon and Impington Infant School

What was done?

The Early Years lead, Ms Emily Stevenson, conducted an internal survey aimed to gather valuable information from teaching staff. These are two examples:

1)   How confident do you feel in using open ended questioning with children?

•   Very confident

•   Confident

•   Somewhat confident but could improve

•   Not confident

2)   How confident do you feel in modelling and introducing new language with children (either linked to the current topic or as part of the child's interests)?

•   Very confident

•   Confident

•   Somewhat confident but could improve

•   Not confident

Results from the survey

Results from the survey showed that only half of teaching assistants felt confident in their interactions with the children and the majority of them highlighted the lack of time in the daily routine to have quality interactions with children.

In terms of rationale, with such a focus in the new framework on closing the gap within children's language, Emily felt it was important to ensure that all adults feel confident in knowing how to support children's communication and language within the context of a reception classroom.

Following on from the survey feedback, Emily began a training programme consisting of six sessions for the teaching assistants (TAs), which took place once a week. The sessions were focussed on developing a particular strategy each week in terms of effective communication and language skills, as well as the opportunities to share and reflect on their observations and interactions with a 'focus child' each week.

At the beginning of the sessions the TAs were asked to identify a child within their class who had gaps in their communication skills. The TAs then used those children as their case studies when

trying out new strategies and were able to share and reflect on their observations and interactions each week.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The main outcome of the project was the success of the training session expressed by very positive feedback after each session and at the end of the programme.

Through constructive feedback and collaborative interactions, Emily could evaluate what elements of the training TAs were finding useful and how they felt this was having an impact on their daily practice.

Obviously, the greatest impact was on the children's learning, especially on those who were identified by the TAs.

Significant improvements were observed. For example, Emily mentioned the case of one 'focus child' in particular, who was non-verbal with adults in the class before the training activity. Through conversations and interactions, the TAs have been proactive in supporting the communication skills of the 'focus children' they had identified. Strategies have been used during the learning sessions. Adults prioritised quality interactions over quantity of observations.

Considering the success obtained in such a short time, Emily is now keen to continue the training activity again next year, both for teachers and TAs. She aims to use part of her leadership time to share and extend this activity across the whole Trust.

The school will also be developing a parental support activity. Emily has developed a series of short five-minute videos for parents on helping their child to develop the key skills needed in different areas in preparation for starting school. The videos are available on the school's website to share with parents.

Key learning

The project has demonstrated that any training provided to staff needs to be relevant to their practice. However, in order to be successful and directed to real change, the activity should enter into a school routine (e.g., weekly sessions). This will provide more opportunities to discuss and try new strategies and interventions, and promote opportunities to engage in dialogue with colleagues in order to reflect on learning. From Emily's experience, one-off sessions do not always have a great impact on staff.

The challenge, however, comes from the busy schedule that all members of staff have during the school year. As Emily has rightly pointed out, it is very easy to forget the basics of quality interactions between adults and children in Early Years with everything else going on in a busy classroom. Therefore, it is vital to take the time to have regular updates and reflect on best communication and interaction practice.

2. Trumpington Park Primary

Supporting parents to better understand the journey of communication and help them engage with their children at home

Research Team and Setting

Ms Mel Shute – Head teacher mshute@cptrust.co.uk

Ms Charlotte Leaver – Assistant head – cleaver@cptrust.co.uk

Dr Roberto Filippi, SSLiC Facilitator, and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Human Development, UCL Institute of Education

Background

Trumpington Primary is the newest CPET school. It was purpose built, opening in 2017 and sits in the centre of a new development in South Cambridge. About 50% of the pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), which brings an even greater richness and diversity to the school. In addition, the school has a high number of pupil premium and the effects of three lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic were particularly challenging for their speech and language development.

A number of children have started their Reception year below the expected age and stage. Therefore, re-stablishing routines, parental support, cultural traditions and school expectations, were some of the many challenges for Trumpington Primary and the Early Years leaders.

With this in mind, Mel and Charlotte aimed to increase and encourage the active participation of parents in their children's education, and offer them more support to better understand the journey of communication and speech development.

The SSLiC Self-Assessment Audit highlighted the need to develop opportunities for the school to support parents with implementing language learning strategies in early years. Mel and Charlotte acknowledged that raising the importance of providing language learning opportunities at home was an area in which urgent work was required.

The results from the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT) identified many strengths and good practices that the school offered to their pupils of two reception classes. As also emerged in the SSLiC Self-Assessment Audit, the Early Years team was strong and worked well together under Charlotte's leadership. The newly built school was designed to offer all pupils an optimal learning environment (Figure 2). During the observation, it was clear that all children were engaged in structured conversations, role-play activities and had plenty of opportunities to work in small groups and actively interact with the teachers and teaching assistants.

Figure 2 – the exterior and interior learning environments at Trumpington Park Primary School

What was done?

The school Reception Class Team met to talk about the areas that needed immediate attention and other that would have required a period of time to be fully implemented and couldn't be included in this short-term project.

The first thing that Charlotte put in place was a questionnaire to gather valuable information from parents and carers. They had the opportunity to share their view on what they thought worked well, what could be improved, and what the term communication meant for them.

In addition, the Reception Class Team created a weekly question activity to support the parent-child conversation at home. Children had the opportunity to share with their parents and carers the key vocabulary learned in the classroom.

The school also introduced 'a no mobile phones policy' within the classroom's outside area, with the aim of giving a higher focus on the importance of speech and communication when children were dropped off and collected.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The questionnaire answers highlighted that the majority of parents and carers were aware of the issues related to challenges of poor language development, especially if they knew that their children fell behind the age-related learning stage.

However, many of them did not know how to encourage, support and enhance their child's further development if their learning was in line with the age-related progress. Charlotte further looked into their answers and examined how parents and carers supported their children with communication through play. She was surprised to see that only 57% of the parents felt confident in using play to support their children's communication. Charlotte reflected upon the fact that teachers usually take this for granted, that is, they would hope that a parent knows how to play with their children.

Talking to the parents, Charlotte realised that parents are eager to know more and engage more proactively with the school to support and enhance the communication journey for their children. In particular, parents of EAL children, expressed their difficulties and concerns for supporting their children because their command of English was not good enough. They all welcomed the opportunity to attend dedicated workshops with the aim to raise awareness and provide them with more support.

Key learning

Since carrying out the project, the Reception Class Team has become more aware of the worries and concerns that parents and carers have about supporting communication and their children's language acquisition at home. Moving forward to the new school year, the school will dedicate particular attention and support to EAL parents for the developing of language skills.

The results from the questionnaire highlighted that some parents were embarrassed to ask for help because they felt they should be able to support their children.

The team is putting in place a new bank of resources (e.g., games, books) that can be used by parents at home to support all pupils' language development.

The school is now planning to organise a workshop with all parents at the start of the next academic year. They are also planning to use technologies more efficiently to communicate with parents, for example, recording short videos that explain to them how to support their children and providing a more insightful overview of the curriculum. The school senior team will be thinking very carefully about the key information that needs to be shared with parents and carers at the next induction.

The key learning is that the school wants to adopt a holistic approach in which all children and parents/carers feel supported, not just those who were identified as needing speech and language help.

3. Hatton Park Primary

Working more collaboratively with parents to support their involvement in promoting language opportunities at home

Research Team and Setting

Anthony Aguda – Head teacher aaguda@cpetrust.co.uk

Sophie Hixson – Early Years Lead shixson@cpetrust.co.uk

Linda Pascoe – EY teacher

Mrs Gill Brackenbury, SSLiC Facilitator and Director of the UCL Centre for Inclusive Education

Background

Hatton Park in Longstanton is a sponsored school which has grown from under 150 pupils to over 300 pupils since it joined the Trust. Children have made great progress and are achieving well. The community is very supportive, but the school needs continued support to sustain the high standards being achieved.

The Head Teacher and Reception Class Team were confident that strong foundations for language learning were in place in the school underpinned by high quality professional development for staff. Although no formal language leadership team had been established in the school, they were keen that involvement in the SSLiC project would inform the development of a Communication Team comprised of key members of staff throughout the school.

The audit highlighted strengths in staff awareness of identification and support for children with SLCN with robust measures in place for monitoring the progress of children with language and communication difficulties, in line with the graduated approach. The school had identified a target group of children in each class who started school with language skills below age related expectations. The audit confirmed that stronger partnerships needed to be fostered with parents in order to support the children to reach their full potential.

What was done?

The Head Teacher and Early Years Team decided to focus on working collaboratively with parents to promote language learning opportunities in the home. This was to be supported by resources shared with parents. It was important to ensure that the support and resources created to support parents met the needs that parents themselves identified. Therefore, a short questionnaire was distributed to parents focusing on the following areas:

- How important do you think speaking with your children is for their language development?
- What information and resources would help you to support your child's language learning at home?

The findings from the survey demonstrated that parents/carers wanted information and guidance on effective strategies to use at home with their children to build opportunities for language learning. It was evident that a high proportion of parents had received no training related to children's language development. 93% of parents reported having had no training on children's language development with 79% indicating that they would like the opportunity to access training and advice in this area. In addition, a need was identified for access to resources and activities to support language development at home. Greater active collaboration and partnerships with parents were to be the focus of the school's action plans.

In response to feedback from the questionnaire, the school now provides weekly activities for parents /carers to undertake at home with their children. A bank of learning activities has been developed to give families access to a range of creative, engaging activities that promote spoken interactions between parents and children. A new area has been created on the school website, Supporting Language at Home. The resources and strategies on the website provide additional support and can be accessed by parents at any time.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

The school reports that the profile of language in school and at home has been raised by engaging parents with regular dedicated activities. Participation in the SSLiC programme has emphasised the importance of communication and language skills and has led to developments in the area of oral language being shared more explicitly with parents and staff.

The school is now seeing evidence of higher levels of confidence among parents/carers in how to support children with language learning in the home. Parents are beginning to engage more fully with the school in developing partnerships for language learning. COVID has, however, continued to present a challenge as the restrictions have delayed plans to invite parents into school for information evenings, coffee mornings etc. It has also been difficult to track the precise level of parental engagement with the online and weekly activities available.

Key learning

Involvement in the SSLiC programme has demonstrated that it is vital to elicit regular feedback from parents to not only gain a better understanding of their views, but also to ensure that the support put in place meets the specific needs identified by parents and carers through the questionnaire. It has become evident that parents are very keen to access information evenings at school and to learn new strategies to use at home to support language development. The school is committed to meeting this need by extending and developing the range of resources and weekly activities made available for families. Plans are in place to create videos for parents modelling techniques and strategies that can be used in the home to support children's language development.

The learning gained through the project is being used to inform improvements in transition planning to ensure that parents are engaging with the school in the area of language learning even before the children begin their school life at Hatton Park and that strong partnerships are built with parents when children start school in September.

4. Somersham Primary

A whole-school approach to improving language and vocabulary

Research Team and Setting

Jonathan Clarke - Head teacher jclarke@cptrust.co.uk

Jo Shee – Early Years Lead jshee@cpetrust.co.uk

Denise Heal – EYFS teacher dheal@cpetrust.co.uk

Mrs Rosanne Esposito, SSLiC Facilitator and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Human Development, UCL Institute of Education

Background

The trust's recent addition (from April 2019) is Somersham Primary School which was judged inadequate in June 2018. Somersham is also a sponsored school which has great potential to be a high achieving school. The children, parents and community are very responsive and willing to support the necessary changes needed to move the school on. A new Head of School has been appointed with other staff changes from September 2019. The trust realises that the quality of teaching and learning needs to be the focus. Progress is being made. The buildings and environment also require improvement as they have clearly been neglected over many years.

The Head Teacher and Reception Class Team recognised that although there were some elements of good practice in the development of early language, a more strategic approach was required to further develop and extend this good practice across the school. Jonathan and Jo were keen to formalise good practice in language learning in an ethos which would facilitate whole school understanding and 'buy in' to improve outcomes for all.

The SSLIC Self-Assessment Audit provided further evidence of good practice in some individual classrooms, but also highlighted a lack of consistency in the extent to which classroom environments supported language and communication. It also made clear that in order to develop a consistently high standard of language-rich classrooms and learning opportunities, a whole school approach would be required to lead improvements in oral language, with a particular focus on vocabulary.

What was done?

Language Leaders were appointed to support the leadership team in developing a whole school approach to understanding and improving language and vocabulary. A Philosophy for Language Learning (Figure 3) was created by the team to establish a shared understanding of the principles which should underpin classroom practices:

> 'We aim to enable our children to have the confidence to approach social situations with a mature, well-rounded focus and express their wants, needs and emotions in a constructive and well-mannered fashion. We strive for our children to become happy learners who can understand the world around them and comprehend their actions and the consequences of these. Our aim is to provide a structured approach to teaching these important factors to give children the best possible advantages for continued growth.'

Figure 3 – The Philosophy for Language Learning logo and message

The Philosophy of Language Learning was shared with staff members at a staff meeting to ensure whole school understanding and commitment to embedding the philosophy in practice. Staff were supported in operationalising these aims through examples of the good practice that the leadership team and Language Leaders should see during learning walks and classroom observations.

The Philosophy for Language Learning was subsequently used to inform the creation of a Philosophy for Language Learning Observation Tool. The format was based on the Communication Supporting

Classroom Observation Tool (Table 1), but with the specific focus areas for high quality language learning informed by the good practice elements outlined in Somersham's philosophy.

Table 1 - Philosophy for Language Learning Observation Tool

	Somersham Primary School - Philosophy for Language Learning	Not Seen	Observed	Comments
1	Staff model correct, accurate and ambitious vocabulary and where appropriate correct or modify the children's spoken English.			
2	Children are encouraged to discuss, talk and share, with adults choosing to intervene at their professional discretion.			
3	Staff model vocabulary or extend conversations through the use of open questions.			
4	Display boards for specific subjects show the language being taught and higher level vocabulary learnt through reading or during English is displayed.			
5	Displays include visuals to support learners and questions to encourage interaction and promote discussion.			
6	Talking partners are at the centre of the teaching and learning process and all children have the opportunity to share, speak and learn with each other.			
7	Staff encourage children to speak in full sentences and where appropriate provide stem sentences to scaffold children's talk.			
8	Open-ended questions are displayed on working walls and interactive boards to ensure that children have the opportunity to talk with peers and adults.			
9	All children are exposed to higher level texts and to a range of complex and ambitious vocabulary.			
10	Oral storytelling is used in all classes to ensure that all children have access to a rich, broad and varied vocabulary.			

Following analysis of the SSLIC Self-Assessment Audit and the classroom observations, the leadership team felt that the inconsistencies in language learning was related to both knowledge and understanding of good practice but also to levels of staff confidence in developing children's language. In order to gain an insight into staff confidence, a staff questionnaire was created and distributed to teachers to be completed in a staff meeting. Staff were asked to rate their confidence using a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all confident and 5 as extremely confident. The focus was on the following areas:

- How confident do you feel in supporting the development of children's oral language skills?

- How confident do you feel in identifying early signs of oral language difficulties in children?

- How confident do you feel in planning oral language learning opportunities?

- How confident do you feel in assessing children's oral language skills?

- Have you accessed any professional development activities you had in the last three years in supporting oral language skills in the classroom? (An open text box was provided for staff to describe briefly any training accessed).

Responses from staff demonstrated that on average staff were moderately confident, (average rating of 3/5 across all questions) highlighting the need for support from the Language Leaders and ongoing monitoring of staff confidence levels following in school training and support provided throughout the SSLiC project and beyond.

What were the findings and outcomes of the project?

Classroom observations have been undertaken regularly across the school, revealing greater staff awareness of how to create stimulating language-rich classroom environments. There is evidence of teachers updating classroom displays with more relevant, interactive displays and 'not just wallpaper.' Some inconsistencies remain but where good practice in language learning is embedded, there is sound evidence of children using higher level vocabulary in both oral and written language. Furthermore, these improvements in the learning environment were noted in an external teaching and learning review in June 2021:

> 'The learning environment is rich, stimulating and well-resourced, promoting an interest in books, literature and learning.'

Staff have a greater understanding of the school's approach to language development and the support available from the Language Leaders. The Philosophy for Language Learning is beginning to inform good practice in classrooms with the examples of good practice and guidance from the leadership team showing signs of increasing staff confidence levels. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage are developing new, creative ways to introduce new vocabulary e.g., the use of talking tins.

Key learning

The school has recognised the importance of ensuring that communication with staff is at the forefront of all developments in the school. The project has demonstrated the importance of taking staff views and explicitly making them aware of language learning initiatives to secure staff buy in to strategic changes in practice and provision. It has become clear that sharing good practice is central to building a whole school ethos and ensuring consistency, particularly in during COVID when staff are unable to leave their 'bubble.'

There is a strong commitment to ensuring that the improvements in classroom language learning environments are sustained. The project has led to a greater understanding of language learning provision amongst existing staff. With new staff joining EYFS in September, there is a need to focus on promoting language-rich interactions with children during continuous provision. The next steps

are to build on the improved language provision in the school by sharing strategies with parents and carers to promoting language-rich talk with their children at home.

The school also plans to share the Philosophy of Language Learning with parents/carers and to develop curriculum planning to ensure there is a specific focus on vocabulary, particularly when introducing new topics. This topic vocabulary will also be shared with parents and carers.

Final Conclusions

Despite only having four months to conduct this project, we reached some positive results.

Summary of results:

The CPET schools' commitment in collaborating with us in UCL was key to the success of the project. We intend to continue this collaboration by extending this project to other age-groups and schools.

- The success of the TA training session in one school expressed by constructive feedback and collaborative interactions. The greatest impact observed was on the children's learning, especially on those who were identified by the TAs.
- The school's plan to continue the training activity again next year, both for teachers and TAs. The aim of the lead teacher is to use part of her leadership time to share and extend this activity across the whole Trust.
- The school will also be developing a parental support activity. The videos are available on the school's website to share with parents.
- Another school is now seeing evidence of higher levels of confidence among parents/carers in how to support children with language learning in the home. Parents are beginning to engage more fully with the school in developing partnerships for language learning.
- In the final school classroom observations have been undertaken regularly across the school, revealing greater staff awareness of how to create stimulating language-rich classroom environments.

Challenges:

- The lack of male staff in the early years setting, which is not a deliberate choice of the Trust but is due to the absence of male applicants for this post. During the observation phase, the children were eager to interact with the male UCL researcher (the only male in the room) when they saw him and gave him the drawings (Figures 4 and 5).

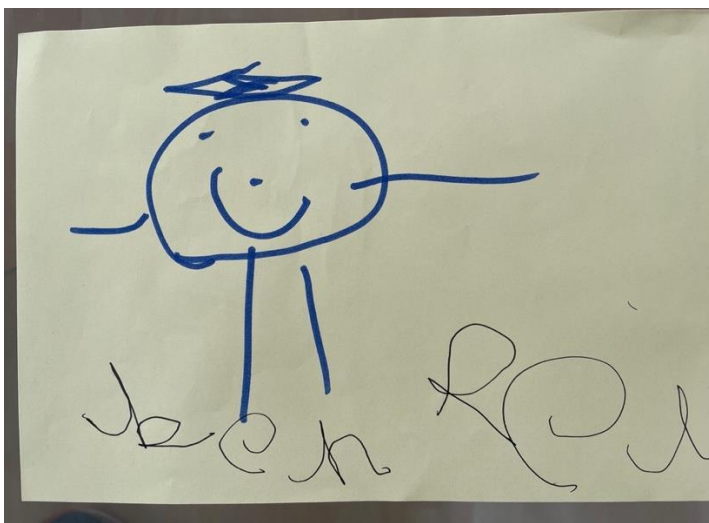Figure 4 – A sunny day by Daisy at Somersham

Figure 5 – Dr Roberto Filippi's portrait by Reuben at Histon

Next Steps from UCL team:

As an immediate result of this collaboration Dr Roberto Filippi has organised an online seminar series to bridge educational sciences with practice in education (see Programme below). Ten leading experts in the field of Education and Psychological Sciences will engage with CEOs of multi-academy Trusts, Principals, Headteachers, Teachers, Governors and HE Students. The initiative has been praised by the Dean and Director of UCL Institute of Education, Prof. Li Wei, in one of his communications to the whole Institute.

Programme

19/10/2021 – **Prof. Li Wei** - Dean and Director of UCL Institute of Education

16/11/2021 – **Prof. Michael Thomas** – Director of the Centre for Educational Neuroscience, Birkbeck/UCL

07/12/2021 – **Prof. Julie Dockrell** – Director of the Centre for Language, Literacy and Numeracy, UCL, Institute of Education

18/01/2022 – **Prof. Antonella Sorace** – Director of Bilingualism Matters, University of Edinburgh

22/02/2022 – **Prof. Dagmara Dimitriou** - Director of the Sleep, Research and Education Lab, UCL Institute of Education)

22/03/2022 – **Dr Laura Crane** – Deputy Director of the Centre for Research in Autism and Education, UCL Institute of Education

26/04/2022 – **Prof. Victoria Murphy** – Director of the Department of Education, University of Oxford

17/05/2022 – **Dr Zachary Walker** – Head of the Department of Psychology and Human Development, UCL – Institute of Education

21/06/2022 – **Dr Jo Van Herwegen** – Head of Research – Department of Psychology and Human Development, UCL – Institute of Education

12/07/2022 – **Prof. Ianthi Tsimpli –** co-Chair of Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages & Linguistics (Cambridge University)

All talks are **free of charge** and will be on Zoom, from 6 to 7pm, London time

Registration: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bridging-educational-sciences-with-practice-in-education-tickets-169625282787

References

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*.

Dockrell, J., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S., & Lindsay, G. (2012). *Developing a communication supporting classroom observation tool*. London: Department for Education. https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE RR247-BCRP7

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, 31(3),* 1-16.

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.

Markussen-Brown, J., Juhl, C.B., Piasta, S.B., Bleses, D., Hojen, A., & Justice, L. (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.

Schucksmith, M. (2016). How can academics and the third sector work together to influence policy and practice? *InterAction.*

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

Useful websites

Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit (2014) http://educationendowmentfoundation. org.uk/toolkit/

Contact

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:

Centre for Inclusive Education

UCL Institute of Education

Bedford Way

London

WC1H 0AL

Please follow us on twitter: @CIE_IOE

Website: www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-cie