The National Strategies
Early Years

Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Consultants and Early Language Lead Practitioners

Third instalment
Destination: Every Child a Talker

department for
children, schools and families

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Contents

This booklet is part of a range of National Strategies *Every Child A Talker* (ECAT) materials. It aims to support the work of Early Language consultants and Early Language lead practitioners by sharing examples of effective practice from Wave 1 and Wave 2 ECAT local authorities (LAs).
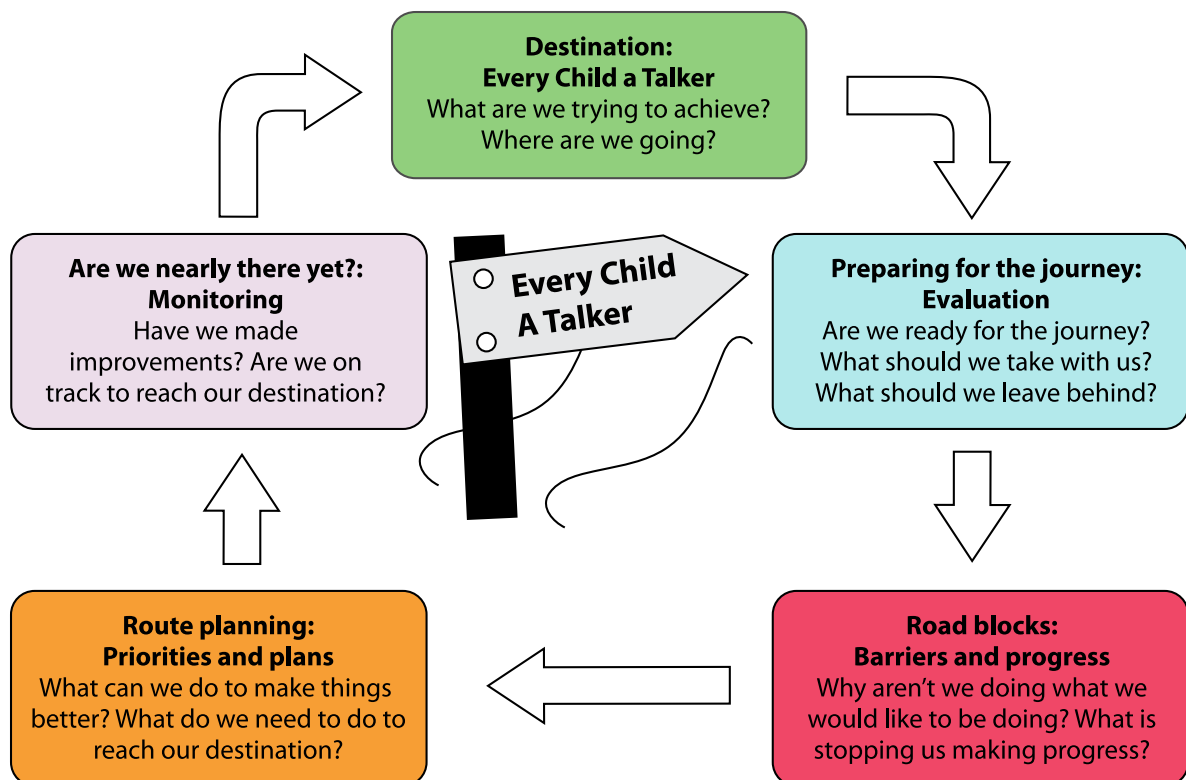
For more information about ECAT see **www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies** and select Early Years.

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Section 1: Starting out

Welcome to *Destination ECAT* the third instalment of the *Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Consultants and Early Language Lead Practitioners.*

Every Child a Talker (ECAT) is designed to help practitioners and parents create a developmentally appropriate, supportive and stimulating environment in which children can enjoy experimenting with and learning language. Through everyday, fun and interesting experiences which reflect children's interests, ECAT encourages early language development right from the outset, extending children's vocabulary so that before they start school, children are confident and skilled communicators. ECAT is funded by the DCSF in all local authorities on a three year rolling programme between 2008 and 2011.

The diagram below is from page 7 of the first instalment of materials for Early Language lead practitioners and introduces the audit process as an effective way of reaching the final destination – the setting in which every child is an effective communicator. For the purposes of this document we describe the destination as 'Every Child a Talker', recognising that there are other ways of communicating, such as the use of gesture, sign language and augmentative and alternative communication.

Destination:
Every Child a Talker
What are we trying to achieve?
Where are we going?

Every Child A Talker

Are we nearly there yet?:
Monitoring
Have we made improvements? Are we on track to reach our destination?

Preparing for the journey:
Evaluation
Are we ready for the journey?
What should we take with us?
What should we leave behind?

Route planning:
Priorities and plans
What can we do to make things better? What do we need to do to reach our destination?

Road blocks:
Barriers and progress
Why aren't we doing what we would like to be doing? What is stopping us making progress?

Every Early Language Consultant (ELC) and Early Language Lead Practitioner (ELLP) will have followed a different route on their journey towards 'Every Child a Talker'. We all know the destination but the preparation will have varied, and so will the barriers encountered. Within all these diverse journeys, however, there are some common elements.

This third instalment of the *Every Child a Talker* (ECAT) file looks at the commonalities of the journeys through a series of case studies. All the case studies are presented in the words of the ELLPs and ELCs who wrote them. Sometimes they have been edited, to avoid repetition or to improve clarity,

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but in all cases every effort has been made to respect the writer's voice. The case studies are as diverse as the journeys themselves, but all focus on the aims of ECAT, to:

- raise children's achievement in early language;
- increase parental understanding and involvement in children's language development;
- raise practitioners' skills and knowledge.

In addition to the case studies provided in this document, more can be found at **www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies** where there is also information about how to share your own ECAT case studies.

The case studies are organised into three sections, focusing on children, parents and practitioners although, of course, everything we do has implications for children and their parents and families, so the sections are linked. Every case study includes all three groups. Some of them are long, going into a lot of detail; others are short snapshots, explaining a top tip or a one-off activity. It is too early to draw firm conclusions about the impact of ECAT on children's learning, as some of this material was written after only a few months of working on ECAT. However, it is apparent that practitioners are more aware of children at risk of delay in language development and have at their disposal a range of strategies to support these children and their parents, as well as an increased awareness of what makes for an effective communicative environment for all children. Everyone involved in writing these cameos of practice acknowledges that they are at the beginning of a journey and that there is much more to develop, but they are sharing their practice because they believe that early communication is important and would like to inspire others who may just be starting out towards destination ECAT.

Each section sets the scene with a short 'story' before introducing the case studies:
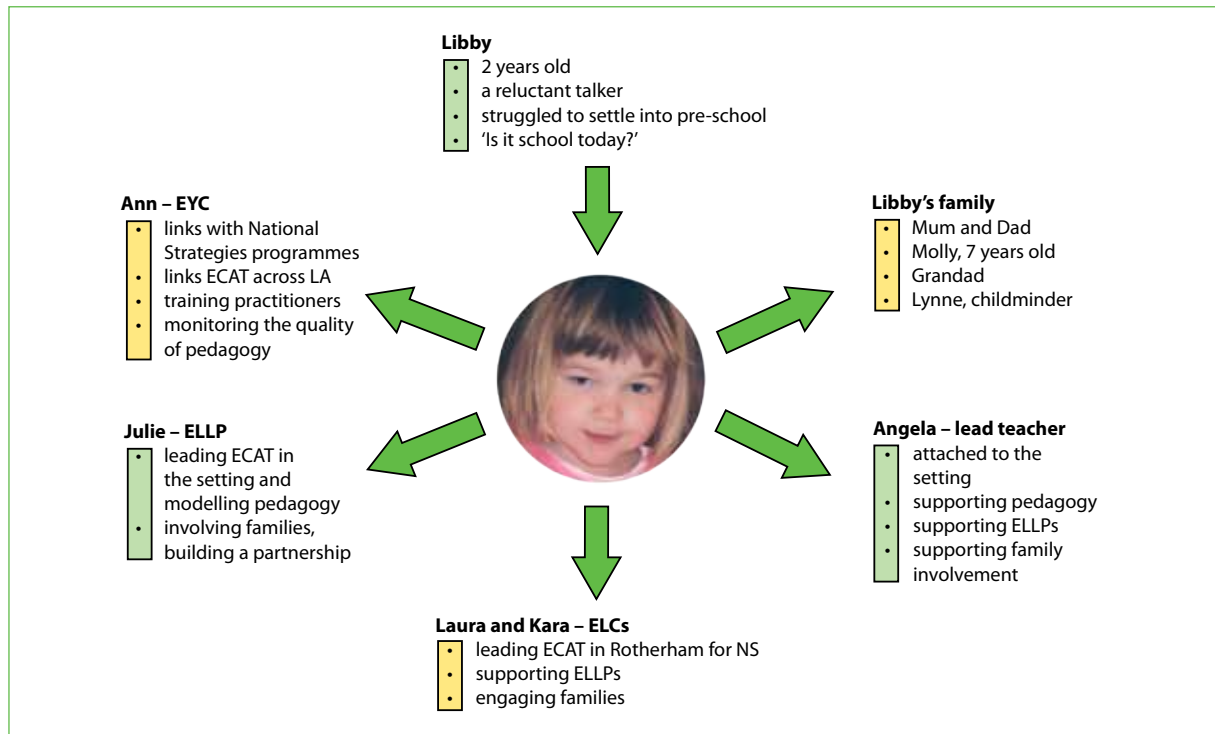
- the child's story
- the parent's story
- the practitioner's story

Throughout the document the acronyms ELC and ELLP are used for Early Language Consultant and Early Language Lead Practitioner.

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Section 2: Children

The child's story

Libby
- 2 years old
- a reluctant talker
- struggled to settle into pre-school
- 'Is it school today?'

Ann – EYC
- links with National Strategies programmes
- links ECAT across LA
- training practitioners
- monitoring the quality of pedagogy

Libby's family
- Mum and Dad
- Molly, 7 years old
- Grandad
- Lynne, childminder

Julie – ELLP
- leading ECAT in the setting and modelling pedagogy
- involving families, building a partnership

Angela – lead teacher
- attached to the setting
- supporting pedagogy
- supporting ELLPs
- supporting family involvement

Laura and Kara – ELCs
- leading ECAT in Rotherham for NS
- supporting ELLPs
- engaging families

The team around the child – working together to support Libby's language development

Pre-school
- Sharing observations with families
- Stay and play sessions focussing on talk
- Provided resources for families – story sacks
- 12 parent packs, e.g. a bag for babies, rhymes and CDs, the farm
- ECAT newsletters for families
- Support leaflets for parents
- ECAT event for families

Home
- Sharing observations with pre-school
- Using the story sacks and engaging in talk together – "Libby gets very excited about the one with the dummy and the teddy"
- 'Lots of talk and reading ..Libby wants to read to Molly now.'
- Family has taken a keen interest in Libby's progress and shared 'stories' from home with the pre-school
- Grandparents and childminders have been included

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Libby enthusiastically reading 'I want my dummy!'

Brent: Places to talk

The ELC explains the learning journey for ELLPs leading staff teams in making dens and cosy corners and becoming co-players with the children.

It became apparent at the first cluster meeting that ELLPs were very interested in providing dens or cosy corners because they understood children's need to be relaxed and comfortable and, having audited their setting environments, could see the potential for improvement. They also wanted to know more about the role of the practitioner in these areas. We discussed the role of the adult, who needs to be a good communicator; a good listener, a flexible planner and a sensitive co-player.

We decided that the focus would be on developing role-play, cosy corners and dens with whole staff teams, not just ELLPs, although the initial training was delivered through discussion and practical activities at a cluster meeting. This was part of a discussion about Enabling Environments. Groups of ELLPs worked together on the task of creating a role-play area or cosy corner, indoors or outdoors, using bamboo canes and fabric. One group created a 'shoe shop'. This proved to be an exceptional opportunity for team-building, as well as a fantastic problem-solving opportunity. The discussions about the advantages of different types of den, and the differences between indoor and outdoor dens generated great enthusiasm for more active exploration.

In the cluster training we talked about creating a physical environment that would encourage children to talk and interact. For example, were there plenty of interesting objects and artefacts to capture their curiosity and motivate discussions?

Not all cosy corners have involved bamboo canes and fabric. One ELLP was surprised when observations revealed that children were not using the large but exciting book-sharing area independently in the way that was expected. A simple cosy corner was created, under a table in the foyer area, with some sheer fabric. A few attractive cushions, a small fluffy rug and some interesting books generated a lot of interest from boys and girls. Children used the area independently, alone, in pairs or small groups. The success

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of this indoor area led to the development of lots of similar areas, indoors and outdoors, where children can be together and chat. Another ELLP stated: 'After doing the talking audit, I realised that there were many areas of the classroom where little or no talk was happening, so I created a quiet covered area with pillows and books. The children love this area and often have secret conversations.'

Another setting decided to use the story of the three little pigs to create a straw house with the children. They used canes, garden twine, sticky tape, etc. The children enjoyed constructing the house and learned a lot through talking and working together. This included all areas of learning and development for the children – communication, literacy and language development (CLLD), personal, social and emotional development (PSED), knowledge and understanding of the world (KUW), physical development, creative development and problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy (PSRN).

The straw house

Developing 'Places to talk' has now become a theme of ECAT in Brent. Practitioners have:

- been keen to try out different areas;
- developed the areas from children's interests and experiences;
- used lots of real objects;
- become aware of the role of the adult;
- changed areas to suit the needs of the children;
- become co-players with the children;
- been inspired to explore more.

An outside den under a climbing frame, using all of the available space

It is too early yet to judge the impact of all this den-making on children's language but ELLPs report that more children are talking with each other and that formerly quiet children have become more confident talkers as result of this work.

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Haringey: Possibility pockets and Chatterboxes

This short case study explores another aspect of the enabling environment for communication. As in the previous case study from Brent, the ELLPs worked with the children to develop their interests.

As part of a focus on developing Enabling Environments, ELCs and ELLPs at one cluster meeting shared the contents of a wicker basket and discussed the possibilities for 'chatter' that could be promoted through exploration of the contents. Each ELLP then took away a set of three stacking baskets (one full of interesting natural objects). The first gap task was to allow a group of children to explore the content of the basket, observe and record the response, and be prepared to share findings with colleagues at the next cluster meeting. The second task was to create a new basket and to name it, with the children. The resulting baskets were as creative and diverse as the practitioners and children who created them. The baskets developed from children's interests, some evolving from favourite books and others from role-play and imaginative play themes.

The pirate basket

The many important findings from the development of the baskets shared by ELLPs included:

● the importance of time for children to explore independently;

● the ways in which the same resource can be used in different ways with children of different ages;

● the importance of time for individual children, pairs and very small groups to investigate;

● practitioners' assumptions about the ways in which children will use a resource not always being correct.

Possibility pockets and Chatterboxes continue to be developed in Haringey.

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Oxfordshire: Supporting expressive language development for children learning English as an additional language (EAL)

Many children in ECAT settings are thinking, and beginning to talk, in languages other than English. Here the ELC shares some of the guidance the LA uses to support practitioners working with children learning English. The focus is on practical activities for those children in the early stages of learning English.

The Early Years Team in Oxfordshire identified the need to develop further materials to support children learning English. These include:

- strategies for group times;
- child observation prompts;
- an audit in provision for supporting children learning English
- peer observation formats and the Guidelines for Supporting Expressive Language Development.

These guidelines cover all stages of learning English until the child is secure. Stages one and two are included here as an example.

Learning English as an additional language in the early years: guidelines for supporting expressive language development

At all stages

- It is important to **model** language, while playing alongside a child. Use **descriptive commentary** – talking about what you or the child is doing. **Modelling language and using descriptive commentary should make up about 80% of your interactions and no more than 20% should be direct questioning**.
- Allow time for children to formulate responses.

How can adults support and extend language?

1. continued talking even when children do not respond;
2. persistent inclusion in small groups with other children;
3. use of varied questions;
4. inclusion of other children as the focus in the conversation;
5. use of the first language;
6. acceptance of non-verbal responses;
7. praising of minimal effort;
8. expectations to respond with repeated words and/or counting;
9. structuring of programme to encourage child to child interaction;
10. provision of activities which reinforce language practice through role-play.

Clarke, 1992 (pages 17–18)

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	Speaking, listening and understanding	Language used by the child	Examples of what you might hear	What support can the adult give?
Stage one: New to English	• Makes contact with another child in the class • Joins in with other children but may not speak • Uses non verbal gestures to indicate meaning – particularly needs, likes or dislikes • Watches carefully what other children are doing and often imitates them • May talk in first language to other children who share it	Greetings and simple social conventions Yes/No	Raza was looking for a missing piece of a puzzle – 'Butterflies?'	**Use visual prompts such as visual timetables, and props to support stories** **Use descriptive commentary** Model simple sentence structure in routines and activities: *It's snack time now.* *Come and sit down.* Talk about routines, what is happening or has just happened. *'You're doing a puzzle.'* Name the pictures on the puzzle in descriptive commentary: *'Butterfly, balls, cats…'*
Stage two: Becoming familiar with English	• Listens attentively for short periods of time (see EYFS 30–50m) • Uses non-verbal gestures to respond to greetings or questions about self • Joins in repeating language in a story or rhyme (see EYFS 30–50m) • Echoes words and phrases of other children and adults, particularly used in social interaction • Shows confidence in speaking in first or other language • Able to express self in English, using one or more common words	Naming single objects or actions that can be seen Naming something seen in immediate past, using visual clues	Rafiq gestured when he wanted an adult to do up his zip – "Please?" Hajra pointing, when offered a choice of cups – "That one."	Model gestures and actions and respond to child's gestures. *'Shall I do your zip up?'* Respond and extend – add to the child's language. *'Now you can go in the garden!'* Few questions at these stages: ask simple questions in context, that can be responded to with gestures or single words. Offer forced alternatives and use gestures to show what you are referring to. *'Do you want the red cup or the blue cup?', 'Where's…?', for example, 'Where's Mummy Bear?', 'Who…?', for example, 'Who broke the chair?', 'What…?', for example, 'What is Goldilocks eating?'*

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Waltham Forest: Assessing children in their home language

Here the ELC describes the ways in which six ELLPs have been supported to work towards a more inclusive approach to valuing children's home language. The findings from this small study are being used to support further ECAT work in the LA. There is still more work to do on supporting practitioners to be more reflective in implementing assessment approaches that build in a regular EYFS assessment cycle of observe, assess and plan for next steps (formative assessment).

Background

In 2008, 50% of the LA's five-year-olds were learning English as an additional language, but in some of the ECAT settings this was from 60 to 90% of children in the EYFS age group. (The overall national figure is 15.8%.) In total, there are about 162 languages spoken throughout the borough and this pattern changes due to the mobile and transient population.

At the first ECAT cluster meeting in Waltham Forest, concerns were raised by some of the ELLPs regarding requirements and expectations in relation to monitoring children's progress. Most concerns seemed to relate to children learning English as an additional language and the need to assess them in their first language to get a true reflection of their communication and language development.

The best way to assess the development of the children's mother tongue is through discussions with the parents. However, it was evident that, for some ELLPs and settings, there was very little communication with parents of these children and perhaps an underlying feeling that assessment was something that practitioners did alone and that parents' views should not be part of this. There were also practical concerns for example:

- How could they assess children in their mother tongue when they did not speak it themselves?

- How could they communicate with parents who might not be very competent in English?

We were surprised by this. We quickly realised that what might be needed was a fundamental development towards a more fully inclusive ethos, where parent–practitioner partnerships were on a more equal footing and maybe this required a change in setting and practitioner attitudes and dispositions. It was not a question of just helping with finding interpreters and translators, which might not be sustainable over time: without a change in attitude, developments could be very transitory and short-lived.

The case study

Six settings were chosen across the LA: some that had raised concerns and others to provide a geographical spread, with a focus on areas of most disadvantage and a range of Ofsted outcomes. The percentage of children assessed as at severe risk of language delay ranged from 18 to 90%, depending on the setting.

Aims and objectives

- To find out, through interviews, about existing practice in relation to assessing children learning English, whether mother tongue was ever used and how involved parents were in assessment

- To find out more about feelings and attitudes to involving parents in assessment and assessing in the mother tongue

- To support the settings in developing their practice and in building a stronger partnership with parents of children learning EAL, so that they could become more fully involved in their children's learning and development in the setting

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What was planned and has been carried out to date

- The ELCs and the ECAT strategic leads each carried out three in-depth interviews with ELLPs from chosen settings, over nine months.

- The ELCs and ECAT lead produced a pack of materials that included guidance advice, useful books and some audit tools. The pack was given to the ELLPs in the case study project.

- A training day by an Early Years EAL specialist was provided for all ELLPs.

- As a result of information from interviews, it has been decided that ELLPs in all the first 20 ECAT settings will receive the Family Partnerships intensive training. A key area for development is partnerships with parents, particularly parents of children learning EAL, in disadvantaged areas. In the past, the LA has found this training highly effective in moving settings on in their thinking and practice. ELCs and ECAT strategic leads have become accredited Family Partnerships trainers.

Findings

- At the first interview all six ELLPs stated that they strongly believed in the importance of assessing children in their home language. Participating in ECAT had reminded ELLPs or raised their awareness of the importance of this. Initially beliefs did not match the practice in the majority of the six settings. Lack of time and resources, in the form of bilingual early years practitioners, were cited as the barriers.

- At the second interview all ELLPs had developed their personal practice in assessing children in their home language. For example, either using bilingual support or parents to assess children. However, none of the ELLPs had yet formalised these developments, for example, by making them into policy, or shared with other practitioners the rationale for developing assessment practice for children learning English

- At the first interview, all ELLPs had less confidence or belief in using parents to support the assessments in children's home language; only one of the ELLPs had formative assessment processes that used the parents' knowledge to inform assessment (learning stories).

- At the second interview, all ELLPs' confidence in using parents to support the assessments in children's home language had increased. Four out of six ELLPs were now consulting with parents to support assessments of children with EAL.

- In five out of six settings, ECAT monitoring was mainly a summative exercise. Only in one of the settings was the ELLP using the formative assessment* to inform the summative**. Those settings that used bilingual workers to assess children did this as a one-off exercise for ECAT monitoring and did not seem to use them as part of their formative assessment processes. This practice had not changed at the second interview. The one setting using formative assessment (learning stories) for children learning English had continued to develop this practice.

- The LA has promoted the use of reflective journals for ELLPs throughout the ECAT programme and this was discussed further in the interviews in the case study. The ECAT team are now looking at other ways of supporting the development of reflective practice.

Next steps

Implementation of actions in the next term will include Family Partnerships training and case-study settings piloting the LA's new EAL pack. There will also be a case study on the development of bilingual learning stories as well as assessment of the impact on children's learning.

Note: ***Formative assessment** is ongoing assessment based on analysis of observations and information from parents. It helps practitioners identify next steps in children's learning. **Summative assessment** makes statements about the child's progress and should be a summary of all the formative assessment carried out over a long period.

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Durham: Using ECAT data to support vulnerable children

As the previous two case studies demonstrate, children learning English as an additional language may be at risk of delay if practitioners are not skilled at tuning in to them and their families. There are also other groups who may need extra or different support. Here the ELC describes how the LA supported practitioners in analysing their ECAT monitoring data to focus on vulnerable groups.

Background and context

Practitioners within the ECAT programme were diligently observing children and recording the progress of their development in language and communication against the age-related, typical stages provided. This monitoring enabled them to identify particular children who were 'at risk of delay' or 'achieving beyond expectation'. However, we wanted to ensure that, as well as using the information to monitor progress and inform future provision for all children, they would be able to use it to identify and monitor vulnerable groups, be strategic with support, contribute to narrowing the gap and maximise all opportunities for language development in their environment.

What we did

We developed a data-collection sheet that required practitioners to analyse the achievements of vulnerable groups, as well as the whole group, across all four strands of speech and language development. The tool prompts practitioners to record how many children are developmentally at each phase of *Listening and attention, Understanding of language, Speech sounds and talk* and *Social skills* and then to note how children in a number of key groups (children learning English as an additional language, children at risk of economic deprivation, children with identified special education need, boys, girls and two-year pilot children) are achieving. This could be tailored to suit the profile of each setting.

Once this information was recorded, we encouraged practitioners to be analytical about what it may show. We devised a series of prompts to support this process. Practitioners were able to discern any emerging concerns and modify practices and environments accordingly.

Barriers

Key to the success of the process was the development of the understanding, confidence and skill of the practitioners in collecting, analysing, interpreting and using the information for themselves. Essentially, the purpose was the analysis. We felt that practitioners who were able to carry this out would be better equipped to reflect on their practice and the experiences they were offering the children in their care.

For those practitioners inexperienced in this way of working, this was a challenge. It could prove to be time consuming and, indeed, confusing. Initially, they were not convinced of the purpose or value of the analysis and considered it was only for reporting to others.

For practitioners well used to data-collection and analysis, it was perhaps perceived as an unnecessary extension to an armoury that was already adequate.

How we overcame the barriers

The tool was introduced at a meeting attended by all ECAT settings, where small groups analysed fictional data to demonstrate the process and how effective it could be. During the same meeting, each setting was then asked to look at the data they had collected about their own children; consultants were on hand to support and advise.

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Support in settings by our team of consultants varied according to need. Practitioners were encouraged to adapt the tool to reflect the nature of their setting and they were challenged to consider the 'so what?' aspect. This had the effect of developing practice and provision in the settings.

What people said

"We have found the process of reflecting on achievements very useful and have realised that our everyday practices have improved immensely…We shall continue to develop our practices…"

Manager, private day-care setting

"I feel so much more confident…I feel as though the path of speech development has been made clear and I am in a much better position to develop all my children in their speech and language skills. The steps of development and monitoring are particularly useful tools to identify problems and are a source of support …"

Teacher, EYFS unit

"…given me a much better understanding…Made me look at my environment to make it more communication-friendly for some groups…"

Teacher, EYFS unit

Impact

68% of practitioners reported increased competencies in some or all areas of speech and language development.

46% of parents reported general improvements in confidence in understanding speech and language development.

Reporting of children's progress suggests that there is a significant decrease in numbers of children at risk of delay in Listening and attention, Understanding of language, Speech sounds and talk and in Social skills.

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Wolverhampton: Every Child a Talker in a nursery school

In one nursery school, data analysis led the ELLP and headteacher to focus on boys' language development.

Background

The nursery school, which is within one of the most deprived areas in England, has a mainly white British population. The most recent Ofsted inspection report describes the nursery as: 'in an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage…Many children have a very limited range of knowledge and experiences when they start in the nursery. Language skills and early mathematical development are well below average for their age.' The report goes on to say: 'Many respond to questions with nods or gestures rather than talk. They rarely chat to other children spontaneously.' The nursery was judged by Ofsted to be 'good', with 'an effective balance of adult-led activities alongside children's independent play that provide good opportunities for learning.'

Staff members had previously attended an LA conference on meeting the needs of boys as learners, and had already taken steps such as seeking books with positive male role-models, developing use of the outdoors, and holding den-making sessions for families, which involved fathers as well as mothers. Staff had also noted that boys were more likely to engage in mark-making on large sheets of paper, on the floor.

Initial conversations raised particular concerns about the afternoon group attending the nursery, where staff had observed the children to demonstrate less concentration and involvement in their activities than the morning group did. The ECAT child-monitoring tool was used to determine levels of development of children across four strands of language and communication, based on observations in a range of contexts.

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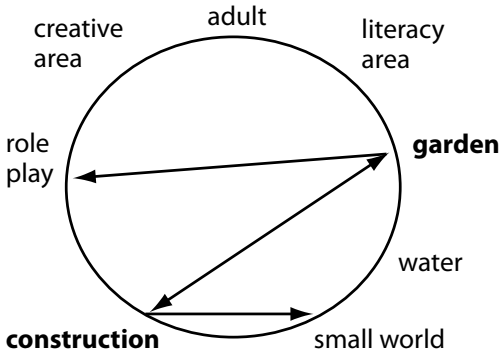
ECAT child progress monitoring	Listening and attention			Understanding of language			Speech sounds and talk			Social skills		
	At risk of delay	As expected	Ahead	At risk of delay	As expected	Ahead	At risk of delay	As expected	Ahead	At risk of delay	As expected	Ahead
Totals	21	3		22	2		17	7		21	3	
Percentage	88%	13%		92%	8%		71%	29%		88%	13%	
Girls												
Totals	9	3	0	10	2	0	5	7	0	9	3	0
Percentage	75%	25%	0%	83%	17%	0%	42%	58%	0%	75%	25%	0%
Boys												
Totals	12	0	0	12	0	0	12	0	0	12	0	0
Percentage	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%

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Investigation and reflection

In order to begin to understand the needs of the boys in particular, the ELLP undertook two types of observation over a period of about one week, focusing on the white British boys in the afternoon session. Additional observations were made on one target child, who will remain in the nursery over the coming academic year. The observation methods included:

- **spider tracking**, recording how the boys were using the environment, and where and when they interacted with adults;

- **language observations** recording the purposes of language children were using.

Observations

Spider tracking	Conclusions
	- The boys' activities centred in a few areas, with a main pathway between the construction area and the garden. - Boys rarely chose to access the literacy and creative areas. - Adults were deployed at planned activities but boys usually opted out of these and joined in only with encouragement. - Boys rarely approached adults – fewer than one interaction with an adult per boy each session. Where this did take place it was usually with their group leader (key person). - Boys therefore had limited exposure to skilled adult support for developing language.

Language observations		Conclusions
Communicate preferences, choices, wants or needs	✓ (22)	- The boys used little language, for a limited range of purposes.
Enter play or join an activity	✓ (16)	- Little language was used to join play activities – the boys would first watch, then play alongside, then join without words.
Plan, develop, or maintain play or group activity	✓ (5)	- A leader organised the play, and was the only one to plan the activity and assign roles.
Resolve or avoid conflict	–	- Play was divided between girls and boys – conflict arose if groups of girls and boys were accessing the same activity.
Entertain, describe past events, tell or retell story	–	
Find things out, wonder, hypothesize	–	

Plan to improve provision and practice

Pedagogical responses were considered within four key elements.

Organisation

- Small-group focus activities will be planned to ensure all children participate, rather than delivering focus activities as opt-in during free-flow play sessions.

- Focus activities will be moved around areas of provision, to encourage greater use.

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Physical environment

- Quiet spaces will be developed, for example, den-building linked to boys' play themes, planned with children in small groups of two or three.

- All opportunities will be offered outdoors as well as indoors, in all weathers.

Interactions

- Key person will build on relationships where boys are more ready to communicate.

- All staff will be trained to develop language support skills, and to lead focus activities effectively.

Experiences

- Paired activities will be planned, to encourage peer-communication; listening and attention activities; story-making project involving families.

- Value talk – staff will record and display stories from home, using talking tins to leave messages and record plans for play.

The next step will be to evaluate the impact of these planned improvements on the children's behaviour and communication skills.

Croydon: Table-top talking – linking ECAT and CLLD

Many of the children involved in Wave 1 ECAT settings are now in schools that may not be involved in ECAT. However, all LAs and schools are now involved in the CLLD programme and the effective practices in ECAT continue to be effective as children get older. The communicative behaviours and approaches advocated by ECAT are relevant to all ages and stages and offer benefits to children in school, as well as those in early years settings. This case study describes the work developed on 'table-top talking' with children in nursery, Reception and Year 1.

As a result of activities carried out in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 classes, LA consultants in Croydon developed a 'table-top talking' booklet. The 'Talking table' resulted from work carried out by Fleur Griffiths (*Supporting Children's Creativity Through Music, Dance, Drama and Art*, 2009, David Fulton). Croydon extended this to support children to express themselves through talking and early writing (if they choose, and if talking naturally leads to writing).

How does it work?

- An adult sits at a table and invites one or two children to come and sit there as well.

- The table-top can be covered in a variety of ways: paper, textured fabric (velvet, sacking, printed fabrics or pictures), or corrugated card or shiny paper.

- Various props are put on the table that will interest and stimulate young children.

- The adult can start off interaction by handling one of the props and asking children what they think it might be, what it could be used for: 'Shall we try it? or 'Once upon a time…'.

- Interaction begins, guided by the adult who supports and develops various ideas from the children, all the times introducing the 'rules of conversation…listen to others respectfully.'

- The adult can support children who may be reluctant to join in talking to start with, can support vocabulary development and be aware of children who are learning English as an additional language.

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- It may be that the adult has a puppet that can invite curious questions from the children. It probably has a name, it may have a bandaged leg. It may be wearing a raincoat or a party hat.

- The table could be covered with paper and various pens, crayons and pencils are available if children want to draw, write and tell a story across the table-top.

Practitioner comments

"A very reluctant speaker was part of the group today. She appeared engrossed in other children's storytelling but was not verbally participating herself, playing the role of onlooker, but she did stay for the duration of the entire session. The following day this child came into Nursery and asked where the 'story-telling box' was, as she called it. Initially she was reluctant but later was retelling known stories to both adult and peers."

"Initially, the children tended only to talk when they held an object and their comments described what they were holding, for example, 'It feels bumpy and sharp,' when describing the log. It wasn't until all the objects had been taken out of the box, that children engaged in conversation. One girl immediately started to tell a story with the objects to herself…'The shark was climbing on the log.'"

"There was a reluctant speaker in the group and a child who is on the autism spectrum who did not speak. The reluctant speaker enjoyed looking at the objects and laughed when the other children put on masks, but did not engage in conversation. It was only when I said. 'Look, the shark has lost its tail,' that he looked closely at the shark and said. 'Look at his face, he is crying!' This was the most I had heard this child say in one go."

"The boy on the autism spectrum showed visible enjoyment, looking closely at the objects, smiling, laughing, so all signs of non-verbal communication."

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Section 3: Parents

The parent's story

Here Hannah tells her story about how her son's communication has been supported by a 'chatterbox'. (A chatterbox is a covered shoebox, containing a variety of objects and a book related to a theme.)

Dominic has been diagnosed as having autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). He is anxious about communicating and it has taken him some time to settle in his setting.. Dominic has a particular interest in transport, especially diggers. Knowing this, the ELLP suggested he take the 'Diggers chatterbox' home.

Dominic's mum, Hannah says:

> *"Dominic has enjoyed having the box at home. He was reading the books, pointing at the picture of the trucks and pretending he is on the building site while playing with the toys."*

> *"Staff have noticed that, since Dominic has been involved with the chatterboxes, he is more responsive and animated in the setting. For example, he initiates communication by taking staff to the cupboard where he knows the chatterboxes are kept, and asking for the diggers box."*

And it's not just Dominic's confidence that has grown. Hannah says:

> *"Me personally, I found difficulty knowing what books were appropriate for Dominic. In the past I was reading him 'baby books' as I was unaware of how much he can understand. Now I feel confident to read him books similar to the book about big machines. I enjoyed watching my son paying attention to every word and pointing at the diggers."*

Hackney: Encouraging parental participation – ECAT 'Walk and talk'

Here an ELC, who is a speech and language therapist, explains how effective this Australian walk-and-talk idea can be in boosting parents confidence.

'Walk and talk' is a concept first devised by Jacqueline Lee and her speech therapy colleagues in Adelaide, Australia. I inherited the idea when I took over from Jacqueline as one of the ECAT consultants in Hackney in May 2009.

I had tried different approaches to involving parents in ECAT but many seemed quite formal and there was often a sense that I was talking 'to' rather than 'with' people. Walking and talking is simple and free and promotes both healthy living and good communication skills.

Here's an example.

A local Children's Centre, which already provided a number of opportunities for parental involvement, was keen to try walk and talk after I had outlined it to ELLPs at a cluster group. The Children's Centre's ELLP and I met in advance to plan an outline of the afternoon. She told me that she had wanted to find more effective ways of working with parents. She found that simply advertising an event had not elicited much response so we decided that parents would be approached individually and given an initiation to attend with their child.

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We decided that we would focus on three top tips to support communication. These were:

- Get down to your child's level.

- Talk about the things you see and do.

- Listen and add words.

We also decided we would have a theme for the walk, which was 'signs and symbols in the environment', as there were lots of these locally, including interesting shop fronts. We planned a route across a local park, culminating in a drink at a local café. (When walking and talking, it's a good idea to have a theme, such as: a wheels walk, a water walk or a number walk. You could also choose a particular book or song and theme your walk and talk around it.)

The structure of our session was decided as follows.

- Meet and introduce each other.

- Have a brief talk about the aims of ECAT and introduce the three top tips.

- Go out on the walk, focusing on using these tips.

- Come back to discuss the talking that took place and to present certificates of congratulation.

On the first day, ten parents, with children of various ages and mainly of Turkish origin, arrived to take part. The ELLP was very pleased with this turn-out. There was one grandparent present but sadly no fathers. This is something to think about for when we plan another walk and talk session

As we walked, it was clear that parents were really focusing on the tips; some examples emerged of the benefits of this approach. Parents were actively pointing out things in the environment, for example, 'Look, can you see the juicy purple berries on the tree?', which created new vocabulary and focused conversations. As children observed and commented, parents were heard repeating and extending what the child had said, for example, a child said 'Digger,' and her parent responded. 'Yes, it's a big red digger.'

Getting down to the child's level was harder as we were walking, but parents made sure eye contact was maintained. Myself, the ELLP and a few other members of staff helped to reinforce and model the tips. We were also lucky to have the centre's link speech and language therapist with us, who took photographs along the way. When we stopped to look in a shop window selling large cuts of meat, one parent realised that her child had a completely different view of the downstairs part of the shop and, when she got down to his level, they observed and commented on things from the same perspective.

When we arrived back at the centre we all gathered to discuss the outing. Parents commented that it had felt unnatural at first but they soon realised that the quality of the talk had improved. One parent said that, instead of just talking a lot about other things, she had focused on the present and it was amazing how much they found to share in an everyday journey.

Certificates of congratulation were given out and later a photographic display was made of the event and put up in the centre. This also sparked some further conversations.

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Waltham Forest: Developing partnerships with parents of children learning English as an additional language

There are over 162 different languages spoken throughout the London borough of Waltham Forest, with many young children learning more than one language and many parents speaking three or four languages. When Every Child a Talker was adopted by the LA, many practitioners were concerned about how this programme could be introduced to the parents of children learning English as an additional language, particularly those parents who were also learning English or who did not speak English.

These case studies describe how, through their participation in ECAT, two settings have been able to develop both their practice and partnerships with parents.

Case study 1

Background

The Children's Centre and Nursery is ethnically diverse, with about 60% of children learning English as an additional language, at different stages. Families are mainly of Pakistani and Polish heritage and, working in the nursery, there are bilingual practitioners who speak Urdu.

The ELLP had been tracking Qi's progress with his communication skills. They knew that Qi was learning English in Nursery but that practitioners needed more information about Qi's skills in his home language before deciding whether he needed a referral to the speech and language therapist. They needed to address concerns about delayed language skills as well as requiring information for the ECAT monitoring process. Practitioners knew that Qi's mother spoke Mandarin and that it was important to speak with her to understand Qi's development and use of language at home. They found an interpreter to support them with this and arranged the meeting for a time that suited Qi and his mother.

During the meeting, and with the help of the interpreter, practitioners gained information about Qi's language skills and were also able to answer questions that his mother posed. This meeting also enabled the ELLP to find out more about Qi's cultural and linguistic background. She discovered that his mother was in fact Vietnamese but had learned Mandarin to communicate with Qi's father, and this was the main language they used at home. She had used Mandarin to speak to Qi since he was a baby, as she had assumed that this was the best language in which to speak to him. The interpreter also discussed with practitioners Qi's mother's proficiency in Mandarin as a language model for Qi. The ELLP was able to build her relationship with this family through the meeting and to use it as a means to discuss and share communication and language learning strategies.

> *"It was fascinating and really valuable to learn more about Qi and his family and background. We had Qi's older brother through our Nursery two years ago and we did not have this information about the family and their language background. We're now able to support Qi better at nursery and work with his mum to extend his learning at home."*
>
> **Qi's ELLP**

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Case study 2

Background

The pre-school is in an urban environment. It is an independent pre-school that evolved from a parent and toddler group. It offers children over three 'the opportunity to play and learn in an Islamic environment'. Although children come from different parts of the borough to attend, the majority of families are local. About 90% of children are bilingual, some speak English and another language at home and have grown up doing so. Some families are new to the country and the children are learning English.

Practitioners are reflective about the skills they use to support children's communication and learning, saying: 'We use lots of gestures and signs, and we break down what we say and match it to what they understand.'

The ELLP at the setting recognised that practitioners were good at supporting children's language skills and children learning English; she encouraged practitioners to use their own language skills to support children's home language skills.

However, she saw some tension between parents' perceptions that the pre-school's role is to teach their children English and to support children's home language skills in the setting. She was also aware that they didn't have detailed information about children's home language skills. One of her actions from the ECAT action plan, identified from her practitioner confidence questionnaire, was to develop her skills and confidence in working with parents.

The ELLP had tailored the parents' questionnaires to include more open questions that would encourage parents to talk about their children's communication skills. She had also reworded them to be meaningful to her and so that she could feel confident in discussing them. The ELLP and ELC worked together to support her to build relationships with parents using ideas from the Family Partnership model.[1]

She approached parents and arranged times that were convenient for them to discuss their child's communication skills. She was open and honest about the reason for wanting such meetings. During their meetings she asked her open questions and was able to find out what parents thought about their children's language skills.

"It was amazing. I couldn't believe how they reacted. They were saying: 'You really care about my child, thank you for taking an interest.' And one parent now comes up to me regularly and says: 'He's doing this and playing with this at home now.' They're telling us much more about what's happening at home. One parent even asked us for our playdough recipe! We also know so much more about what goes on for our children at home, what they do, what they play with, what they watch on TV, as well as their language skills. And parents feel much more comfortable about asking questions and staying after they've dropped their children off, rather than disappearing. I was really nervous about approaching parents before. I didn't really know what to say and now I feel more confident. I would really like to do the whole training in the Family Partnership model."

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1   The Family Partnership Model's theoretical basis is described in *Working in Partnership with Parents, the Parent Adviser model*, Davis H., Day C. & Bidmead C. (2002)

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Luton: Continuing to develop partnerships with parents at Butterflies Nursery at the Marsh Farm Children's Centre

In Luton ECAT is called 'Every Child a Talker: every adult involved', to emphasise the essential contribution that adults make to children's communication. The ELLP, with the support of the ELC, has worked closely with practitioner colleagues to improve their partnership with parents, and support children's language in the home environment.

Here are some of the practical things the ELLP and colleagues have done to engage parents with ECAT.

- They have developed an ECAT interactive notice board in the lobby, with 'ideas tickets' for parents to take away, offering ideas for supporting learning at home.

- They have introduced a 'chatterbox' home-loan scheme. A chatterbox is a covered shoebox, containing a variety of objects and a book related to a theme. A 'birthday' chatterbox, for example, contains birthday cards, a party invitation, a toy birthday cake and a Happy Birthday Maisy picture book. The boxes all look the same from the outside, so the children don't know what is inside until they get home and take the lid off. This creates a sense of anticipation, which is one of the strengths of chatterboxes.

- The loan scheme was launched on a special 'Chatterbox day', when the ELC and ELLP introduced the boxes to parents and their children. One father was particularly excited that his 18-month-old daughter had chosen a 'Very Hungry Caterpillar' chatterbox, as it was his favourite storybook when he was a young child.

A key aspect of ECAT in Luton is to support families in which a language other than English is spoken at home. We encourage parents to help their children become fluent in their mother tongue at home. This is based on the evidence that children who have a strong grounding in their first language can go on to learn English well, and may achieve better at school than those children who have a weaker grasp of their mother tongue.

> *"We asked parents to help us communicate with their children by teaching us at least 10 words and phrases in their home language. One mother, who comes from a Gujerati-speaking background, was delighted to be asked to teach us some basic phrases in her mother tongue. Her two-year-old son was quite shy and quiet, but his face lit up when we said a few words in Gujerati. The families appreciate the effort we are making to find out about their cultures. It gives a clear message that we value all families' backgrounds, and this has helped to improve our relationships with families. It boosts the children's confidence as communicators too."*

ELLP

IDEA CARD

Lying on the floor with your child can count as being physically active too! Short amounts of tummy time for your infant help develop muscle tone in their arms, hands and fingers, upper body and neck.

IDEA CARD

Trying to cook dinner and your toddler wants to help?

Why not sit him down at the table with a pan of dry pasta and a wooden spoon and ask him to help.

Two of the 'ideas tickets' from Butterflies Nursery

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Liverpool: Supporting family involvement in partnership with Communication-friendly Spaces (CfS).

This case study focuses on how one children's centre used the CfS Bags for Families to support their work with parents.

Background

The LA was already working in partnership with CfS. The ELC was able to use this work to support the ECAT settings by linking them into a range of training opportunities, including an LA conference organised in partnership with CfS, *Bags for Families – Engaging Parents*.

The aims of the CfS programme are to:

- improve outcome for all young children and reduce inequalities between them;
- raise and sustain the quality of early years experience for children and their families by:
    - involving parents in their children's speech and language development;
    - improving communication between practitioners and parents;
    - enabling parents to understand how they could support their children's learning;
    - encouraging parents to talk with their children.

About half of the ECAT settings, plus a number of other settings in the LA, were involved. The conference covered three days, with the final day focused on supporting families. Each setting was given five sets of bags and an evaluation tool from CfS. Consultant support was provided from CfS, the ELC and the LA consultant responsible for parent partnership. CfS carried out an evaluation of the impact of the programme for the LA.

Involving parents

Some settings held workshops for parents, following the format of the workshops in the conference. To enable parents to attend, a choice of times was offered, including afternoon and evening sessions. The workshop leaders explained the purpose of the bags and the importance of children's speaking and listening, and how playing helped the children to learn. Parents tried out the bags. These came with no instructions or indication of their contents; this stimulated discussion about what to do with them. The parents took the bags home. They took the project very seriously. Photographs were brought back to settings and practitioners were able to engage in dialogue with parents about their children's speaking and listening.

Feedback

Parents' comments

"The children were more involved in playing with their brothers and sisters."

"The four sisters played together beautifully – not normal!"

"My husband went into the tent with him and they were hiding. They were laughing. He doesn't usually play much with him. They really enjoyed it."

"It's been a really nice time together."

"They both brought books in to read together."

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Children's comments

"Oh Mummy – it's like lying on a beach under the stars!"

(four-year-old)

"It was fun."

(four-year-old)

"I really enjoyed playing with my brother. It was good."

(older sibling).

Practitioners' comments

"It brings back old-fashioned play because they really have to think what to do with them."

"They brought photos back of the spaces they'd made."

Outcomes of the programme

Children

- Well-being, less isolated, higher self-esteem.

- Improved listening environment for all children.

- Higher levels of involvement in speaking and listening activities.

- Reduction in numbers of children to EY Action Plus.

Settings

(Based on CfS evaluation of impact)

- How effective is two-way communication with the family? (Increase from 38% to 55%.)

- How often do you talk to the child's parents? (Increase from 36% to 42%)

- Does the parent contribute to your observation and assessment system?
  (Increase from 16% to 42%)

- Does the parent talk to you about their child's speaking and listening skills?
  (Increase from 24% to 38%)

- Does the parent document evidence of their child's preferred learning context?
  (Increase from 24% to 54%.)

LA

- Analysis of the feedback data from schools and settings that have been developing CfS and use of the family bags with parents has helped us to be more focused in our future planning.

- Established links with other strategic initiatives and programmes, including: IDP, Glue Ear Project, SEAD, CLLD, PPEL.

- CPD opportunities for childminders.

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Next steps

- Use the family bags to develop a supportive home learning environment.

- Practitioners need to see the importance of small but significant steps and build on them.

- Deepen the dialogue about children's learning with parents.

- Develop the use of digital photography and video to make learning visible.

- Support practitioners to feel more confident about sharing understanding about how young children learn and develop. (Learning stories)

- Wave 1 settings not involved initially will be given half-day training and buddied to the more experienced ELLPs.

- Feedback from this group will determine how this is developed with the additional 10 settings.

Bradford: Joint story-telling session for practitioners and parents

Both parents and practitioners can lack confidence in storytelling. Sometimes, without a book to read, they feel embarrassed. In Bradford they got together with a professional storyteller, with some great results.

This was a whole-day event attended by all 20 ELLPs from the 20 target settings. They were encouraged each to bring along one other member of staff and up to three mums and dads. The inspirational professional storyteller shared techniques for positive storytelling.

Nearly three-quarters of participants felt that the event had exceeded their expectations.

Examples of intended changes to practice

Practitioners comments

- To get more involved when telling stories and not to get embarrassed.

- To make story time more exciting, interesting and varied and to make practitioners more exciting to listen to. To make story more exciting and fun!

- Reading stories with more fun and enthusiasm. Using imagination skills more. Interacting more with children.

- Revamp the book corner and make it more appealing to the children.

- Start introducing some sound effects to make stories more interesting.

- Slow down, add to story with my own and children's comments.

Parents' comments

- I will try to make storytelling more lively and enjoyable for my son.

- I am going to make my child a member of our local library and hopefully he will continue to enjoy books later in life, as he does now.

- Make more time to read with the children!

- Read more books.

- Read more slowly, get more books.

- Aim for more interesting story times.

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Kirklees: Parental involvement – doing it together

The Cleckheaton Children's Centre team wanted to get away from ideas of telling parents what to do and to engage with them in open dialogue about children's learning. In this case study, the staff talk about some things they have done to facilitate this dialogue.

At Cleckheaton Children's Centre the early years team met to consider how we could give parents evidence of their children's good speech, language and communication practices, in their own words. We didn't want to 'disseminate' good practice but, rather, to engage in an ongoing dialogue with parents and children.

We have worked with families to develop a set of posters that show children and their carers communicating in real situations. The posters carry clear, simple messages and refer to an aspect of learning from the EYFS.

The 'Dad and baby' poster, for example, communicates the importance of dads joining in and states that messy, investigative play is important! In ECAT terms (from the Top Ten Tips for Talking) the dad is showing how to get down to the child's level and to let the child take the lead.

The set of posters is being produced at the moment. This dad is acting as a role model for others who come to the centre. The posters communicate the message: 'It's about doing this together!'

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Kirklees COUNCIL

Sure Start Children's Centre

Look at my Dad and me!

Dad got down to my level and we both emptied the kitchen cupboard!

Parents, grandparents and children
are learning together.

We are having fun exploring and learning.

Early Years Foundation Stage – Look, Listen and Note

PSED – the sounds and facial expressions young babies make in response to affectionate attention from their parent.

With thanks to Cleckheaton Children's Centre

The 'Dad and baby' poster

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Bournemouth: Dads' reading challenge

The Head of the Barbara Rose pre-school, in Bournemouth, explains how she was inspired to challenge dads to read a bedtime story with their children.

I have always been committed to working in partnership with parents. I, like many other practitioners, feel that parents are a child's first and most enduring educators. Despite overwhelming research that supports this, many parents still need to realise how important they are! I also have a passion for books and really want the children I work with to love reading. So when I read an article in a newspaper that stated that less than 20% of dads read a bedtime story with their child it inspired me to take some action.

I began by printing a challenge to our parent dads (see below) that included the statistic and then said, 'Surely this cannot be true?' Next, story sacks were prepared, each of which included a book and some puppets. The first letter was given out to a target dad who was father to six children, four of them under five years old! He did not speak much when dropping off the children and looked a little uncomfortable. I talked to him about the challenge and he took home a sack with the story The three little pigs, a large wolf puppet and three little pig puppets, to share with his family. This first dad relished the reading challenge and the result is a positive relationship between the pre-school and the entire family. He keeps asking to borrow the story sacks!

Many other fathers have now taken part and the scheme has been very popular. What was meant to be a short-term project is still going on now. Dads have also been asked to take photographs of themselves and their children reading together. We now have a display board dedicated to these lovely pictures, which helps dads to realise just how important they are. To engage with the fathers I think the challenge aspect may have appealed to competitive dads. I also try to the find the right type of books and stories, for example, children love to hear their dad being the big bad wolf and making a scary voice! My main tactics are friendship and boldness. I love to praise the parents as much as I praise the children.

The dads' challenge has been marvellous for the children and their fathers. One Dad said, 'I really enjoyed coming home from work, knowing that my son had brought a story sack home from pre-school for our bedtime story. Because I work, it is very hard to visit him at school but I felt that this project enabled school to come to me.' Our fathers feel more part of the pre-school and some have even asked to join the 'stay and play' group. One dad felt confident enough to offer to read a story to the whole group! Many dads, as well as mums, use the lending library that we have set up. It has also been great for us, as practitioners, to build relationships with parents and to see what a difference it can make when everybody works together.

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The 'Dads are important' poster

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Oxfordshire: The 'Stories and rhymes' project at the Sunshine Centre

Practitioners at the Sunshine Centre have built on the firm foundations of the 'Stories and rhymes' project, as they develop ECAT within the setting. Their work has been a key influence on the direction of ECAT in other settings across Oxfordshire.

The starting point for this project came from the Children's Centre teacher at The Sunshine Centre, Banbury. The setting had identified developing and supporting children's language as a priority. Alongside work with targeted groups, Helen wanted to develop a universal initiative that would involve staff, children and parents across the setting. Nursery rhymes therefore became the focus for two terms of focused language experiences.

Transferring practice from setting to home, through the engagement and involvement of parents, was identified as crucial for maximum impact. The first step was to make sure parents were familiar with traditional nursery rhymes and that they understood the value in sharing stories, rhymes and songs with their children. In discussions with parents, it became apparent that some had little experience of this in their own childhood.

In drop-ins, two nursery rhymes were introduced each week. These rhymes were accompanied by a related focus activity for parents and children, to extend the language experience further. At the end of the session, copies of the rhymes were available for parents and children to take home. The rhymes of the week eventually became a Centre anthology that children, parents and practitioners continue to pick up and share together across the setting on a daily basis.

A Nursery rhyme day was held to celebrate the end of the project. Each member of staff took on the role of a nursery rhyme character and shared their rhyme with children accessing the different provision across the setting. Of course, being in Banbury, this had to include a lady with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes! At the end of

each visit the character left behind a prop to represent their rhyme and to encourage children to retell and recall familiar and favourite rhymes later.

The children's and parents' repertoire of nursery rhymes developed significantly. In addition to this all children who use the setting now have their own book bag. Parents and carers are encouraged to choose two or three books a week to take home and share with their children. Where parents are unable to do this the child's key person will choose a book with the child instead. This has proved to be popular with parents and children have enjoyed revisiting familiar and favourite books as a self initiated activity.

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ICAN training at a children's centre in the North-east

The staff at a children's centre in the North-east identified that children's levels of speech and language development were a cause for concern in the local area. They decided that they would like to receive training, as a whole staff group, to help them support communication skill development in their pre-school group. The staff team undertook the ICAN training on one of the setting's development days.

Each participant on the course was asked to identify a list of the three things or 'pledges' on which they would focus, in developing their practice.

They put these pledges on display, alongside a developmental chart given to them in their training. This chart highlights the stages of children's communication development and understanding. As a centre, the staff were very keen to focus on positive interactions with parents and already had a display board that showed any achievements. They identified things that children or members of staff had achieved and put it up on another board, which they call their 'celebration board'.

The achievements have given staff the opportunity to talk with parents about communication development and children's progress. With parents who spoke little English, the practitioners made sure they were available at the end of the day to point out and explain achievements. For children who had a bilingual co-worker, part of their responsibility was to convey to parents any achievements that were being celebrated on the board.

The day-care manager feels that the children in her care are already demonstrating a real improvement in their social skills; she is also seeing an improvement in support for communication skills development among her staff. A visiting adviser felt that the centre had 'developed in a really interesting way and by using something really simple they have improved the experience of both the staff and the children'.

> *"Staff are now more skilled at identifying particular language problems and this has made them change their behaviour towards the children. In turn, staff have found that the children's behaviour has changed for the better. It is having a positive impact."*
>
> **Day-care manager**

Wokingham: ECAT at the primary school fete

The last case study in this section is a very simple idea, which worked very well and can be used on all sorts of occasions where parents are present in large numbers

An ELLP came up with the idea of photocopying posters and leaflets from the 'Talk to Your Baby' website and displaying them on a table at the local school fete – 'The ECAT Stall'.

She also took her laptop and played the 'Chatter Matters' and 'Time to Talk' DVDs during the afternoon. She was on hand to discuss 'dump the dummy', 'how to read a book to your child' and the importance of 'tummy time', among other topics.

The stall was busy all afternoon and all the leaflets were taken by parents. The ELLP felt that this had been a very successful way of engaging with parents.

This was shared at an ECAT cluster meeting and other ELLPs copied the idea at sports days, family picnics and other group occasions.

Simple, but effective.

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Some comments from fathers and mothers across the country about ECAT experiences

"Talking about how we learned nursery rhymes when we were little has made me realise I didn't do enough rhymes with my son. He loves doing them, so now we do them in the bath all the time."

"I really enjoyed coming home from work knowing that my son had brought a story sack home from pre-school for our bedtime story. Because I work it is very hard to visit him at school but I felt that this project enabled school to come to me."

"I am going to make my child a member of our local library and hopefully he will continue to enjoy books later in life as he does now."

"My husband went into the tent with him and they were hiding. They were laughing. He doesn't usually play much with him. They really enjoyed it."

"Its been a really nice time together."

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Section 4: Practitioners

The practitioner's story

ECAT has given me the opportunities to consider the impact of our provision for language development. In my career I have spent a long time thinking about how to raise results in reading and writing but, until now, have not given talk the precedence it deserves. Having the opportunity to reflect, observe the children with a different focus and time to change, improve and consolidate has been invaluable.

As a nursery we completed audits on the staff, parents and carers and, of course, the children. The parents were the most confident group with the staff, as always, perhaps reflecting a little too much and being quite harsh on their own abilities to support speech and language. The subsequent analysis of the audits resulted in an action plan being drawn up.

The benefits of our ECAT plan

- In our nursery we have looked at the different roles we, as adults, take when we are working with young children. We found that in our setting we were questioning more than we had realised and needed to get a balance in the roles we undertook with the children.

- Activities are now planned in which the adult's role is to foster the language development in a much more structured way but without asking questions all the time.

- Speaking and listening have a much higher priority.

- We allow more time for children to respond.

- We value home language. (We are in a setting in which 85% of children learning EAL.)

- We have specifically developed the malleable area and the home corner and adults are targeted in these areas much more frequently to observe, model and scaffold children's language.

- We have also considered ways of getting parents involved at home and have run several initiatives to promote language development, such as family bags, Lewis the Leopard.

As a team, the nursery have worked closely together and the cluster meetings I have attended have been useful for sharing ideas, resources and having the opportunities to talk to other like minded professionals. It has been a challenge to fit in with life in school, particularly as it has not been on the school termly action plan – something I would recommend in the future. The ECAT project would be invaluable to follow through into Reception and Year 1.

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Westminster: Strengthening childminders' knowledge of typical language development and observation techniques

This is the first of three case studies focusing on childminders. Following the introduction of the EYFS and the need to identify children with language difficulties at an earlier age, childminders were identified as a key group in the Westminster ECAT programme.

The three childcare development officers (CDOs), who support a team of childminders within each of the three geographical clusters (roughly corresponding to the children centres divisions in Westminster), attended ECAT meetings from the beginning of the project. They attended as nominal ELLPs as it was felt that, with ECAT input, the CDOs would be able to pass on the knowledge and skills to the childminders they supported in drop-ins.

The CDOs felt that, for the project to work best, a core group of childminders needed to be more directly involved. They invited a group of over 20 childminders to an initial information session about the ECAT programme and of these 15 confirmed they would take part. This number has now risen to 18.

At this information session, the childminders completed a confidence questionnaire. The areas in which they felt less confident were:

- monitoring children's progress in speech, language and communication (SLC);

- describing a child's stage of development in SLC;

- identifying the next steps in supporting a child's SLC development;

- supporting parents to work with their child's SLC.

The ELCs (both speech and language therapists) provided a one-day training course to include:

- an overview of the importance of the language development;

- detailed knowledge of the component areas of language;

- the importance of positive ways adults can interact with children;

- learning English as an additional language and song groups.

Twelve childminders attended the one-day training course. Feedback was very positive. One childminder commented:

> *"The training was beneficial to me, to confirm the things I thought I knew about communication in young children and it was especially useful to learn about children who speak more than one language – I was unaware of the fact that if children are competent in one language it is OK if they are not speaking English, as this will come later. I also found the Speech and Language pyramid very useful and I often think about this when monitoring a child's language now."*

One childminder noted that she would take away for her own practice *'the songs and how to support children who have English as an additional language'* and that she would share information with parents *'by giving handouts and talking to them'*. Another childminder said, *'I have gained a better understanding of how to support children's speech and language skills.'*

A central element of ECAT is ongoing monitoring of children and it was agreed that each childminder should use the ECAT child-monitoring sheet to track one child. Observations were collected at drop-ins, where the CDOs were available for support.

When the initial information came back from the observation forms, it was noted that, for some of the childminders, children were assigned to a number of different age-group categories, indicating an imprecise grasp of language norms. As a result, a more detailed training plan was planned for childminders in Westminster in autumn 2009, to comprise two evening training sessions linking children's language

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development and observations, monitoring children's progress in speech, language and communication and identifying next steps to support language development. A further Saturday will be devoted to making and using resources to support language development. In addition, the ECAT consultants will attend drop-ins to support childminders in making their observations and will offer support for signing. Childminders will also be introduced to the Keep Your Language Alive (KYLA) campaign, with a view to becoming ambassadors for the campaign and cascading the key messages to parents.

It is planned that, in the spring term, childminders will bring back the language-promoting resource they have made and share how they have used it. A further focus for the spring term will be sharing observations with parents.

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Sunderland: Including childminders in ECAT

The ELC in Sunderland identified the need to be inclusive of all practitioners working with young children and developed tailored support for childminders.

We already had an excellent childminder network system. One network used the same premises as one of the ECAT settings, and childminders and setting could support each other if necessary.

Firstly, as ELC, I went out to meet the group to explain the aims of the project and the commitment level in terms of the audits. The childminders were really keen. Two of them had already attended the 'I Can' Early Talk training and felt ECAT would be an opportunity to extend that knowledge and to evaluate practice further.

Barriers

There were three potential barriers.

- Who would take on the role of ELLP?

- When and how could their involvement be organised?

- How would they access training?

The role of ELLP

The two childminders who had already been on the Early Talk training had additional other commitments so could not take on the role. I then returned to the group to outline the ELLP role in more detail and reassure them that I would support whoever felt they would like a new challenge. One of the other members of the group volunteered and we secured the participation of the group.

Timing

This initially proved more of a barrier, as it was impossible for the newly appointed ELLP to attend the cluster meetings. I decided that we would have to approach the childminders' involvement in a different way, in that I would have to go to them instead. They already met as a group with their children twice a week, so I arranged to attend those sessions or go out to the ELLP's house.

Accessing training

Having overcome the first two barriers, we set about organising the audits. Each of the childminders took some parent audit sheets for each of the children they looked after and we carried out the 'quick' version of the practitioner audit during one of their morning network group meetings. The results showed a lack of confidence in 'Understanding how babies and children communicate', 'Understanding how speech and language develops' and especially in how children's language and communication development can be monitored. I suggested that I could deliver an ELKLAN course entitled 'Talk with Under 5's' and, using a system of mobile crèche workers which already exists in Sunderland, I arranged to go once per month for eight sessions to their morning network meetings and deliver the course. They succeeded in securing permission from the parents for the children they looked after to be cared for by the mobile crèche workers, in the same building in which we were doing the training.

Although we have not yet completed the course, it is going well and I can see the progress they are making in their thinking during every session. There is also a home task that gives the opportunity for using the strategies we have discussed in a practical way.

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Hounslow: Increasing quality and quantity of practitioner talk in child minders

This case study is written by the two speech and language therapists, who share the ELC role. They explain how using video supported ELLPs in really focusing on the quality of their interactions with young children. This is followed by a childminder sharing how this work has helped her to improve the quality of her interactions with the children.

What we did

Following observations at all our settings we identified that the biggest area of need was to improve the quality and quantity of practitioner–child talk.

First, we needed a baseline so we asked all practitioners to video themselves in an interaction with one child or a very small group of children. Then we discussed different interaction styles and the ways that different styles can either support or hinder children's communication development with the ELLPs.

The ELLPs then analysed their recordings and identified positive interaction techniques and areas that needed improvement. They were also asked to think about how their language impacted on the children's language. Each ELLP then identified two aspects of their interaction style to work on and then re-videoed themselves. Both videos were re-evaluated and reflected upon to identify changes in both their use of language and responses from children. Then ELLPs were encouraged to share findings within their early years teams and with other ELLPs in ECAT cluster meetings.

Barriers and how they were overcome

The main barrier was that ELLPs' self-evaluation on their pre-video practice was not accurate. Most ELLPs felt that they used appropriate language techniques. The use of video overcame this. Although they were reluctant to use this at first, the impact was overwhelming. Our ELLPs required lots of support from us throughout the process.

Where to from now?

In order to establish sustainability of practice, ELLPs are being encouraged to continue using video and self-evaluation for themselves and their teams. We believe that these techniques have made the most impact in our settings.

Debbie is a childminder who looks after three pre-school children. This is her story.

> *"The video was a real revelation. Although I used many good strategies to develop early language development, it was clear I simply talked too much and didn't give enough time for children to respond. I also asked far too many questions! So, having identified my key areas for development as:*

- *more comments and less questions;*

- *a more explicit use of the recasting strategy to support the learners.*

> *"I then became aware of trying to make these talk strategies, as well as others discussed in the ECAT meetings, part of my everyday interactions as a childminder. The results are clearly evident in the video footage I subsequently recorded. I talk less, I listen more, the children are supported in how they are playing by the comments I make, relevant to their world and their play. The children are offered a model of language by the talk I use.*

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"The impact of ECAT on my own practice has been incredible. I feel skilled, motivated and knowledgeable about the provision I make for the children's speech, language and communication development and how I can maximise the opportunities for child-led talk in every interaction. The impact on the learners has been just as dramatic. One of the children in particular has developed with great alacrity. He was a reluctant speaker, frequently frustrated at what he couldn't communicate. He is now a clear communicator, who enjoys talking, and is supported by both myself and my husband as we weave the positive interaction strategies into his world.

"Although it took a few weeks for me to embed the strategies into my own working style (I didn't want it to feel too forced), I now feel very confident and am keen to share some of the techniques with other practitioners, as well as the families of the children in my care."

Bradford: Paired video sessions supporting peer mentoring (1)

The idea of using video footage can be quite daunting for some practitioners but ELCs and ELLPs in Bradford identified this as a key way of reflecting on practice.

Aim of training with eight practitioners

- To develop practitioners skills in adult child interaction

- To support practitioners in developing their skills in supporting children with identified speech and language needs

The practitioners worked in pairs, in an hour-long session, with the interaction therapist and ELC. They each brought with them a 5-minute video clip of themselves playing with a child with identified speech, language and communication needs. They each showed their video and were supported to reflect on their skills and to identify an area that they could develop.

This process was repeated in the second week, with practitioners returning with a video of themselves interacting with the same child, while putting into practice the skill identified for work the previous week. Again they were supported to reflect on practice and identify an area to work on.

The third session involved all eight practitioners. Each showed their first and final videos to the whole group and discussion took place about the strategies used, how easy or difficult they were to implement and the impact.

Practitioner comments about the use of video recorders

- The video training has demonstrated to me how I can support children in my setting with speech, language and communication needs. It has especially given me new techniques to support children who have delayed speech, language and communication.

- Doing the video sessions has made me gain confidence in myself and also taught me how I can give examples of positive feedback when doing video sessions with colleagues I work with. Also this course has given me lots of new ideas on how the setting can help and support children with communication, attention and listening skills. I would recommend this training session to other people. K has been excellent and very supportive.

Practitioner comments about changes to their practice as a result of this training

- Wait for eye contact, give one word. Let children explore and investigate at their level. Not to ask questions. Let them process the information.

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- As a result of attending the training at my setting, we have looked at our areas and how we can improve the language development of our children by adding visual resources such as photographs and other types of media. Videoing of the key children with speech and language difficulties has worked extremely well and with good results. I now make sure I give eye contact to those children who need it and work with silence in play to help children concentrate, explore and experiment.

- Silence – It doesn't hurt and it's relaxing!

- Using the video camera with all staff to self-evaluate and really to look at children's interactions. Lots of strategies to put in place. Excellent opportunity to support my ECAT work.

Rotherham: Paired video sessions supporting peer mentoring (2)

In this third case study about the use of video, the writers reflect on practitioners' initial concerns about being taped. Although the process wasn't easy, practitioners found the filming gave them opportunities to identify their strengths in communicating with children.

How we got started

First I spoke to the staff during a meeting and explained that, as part of the ECAT project, we would be filming ourselves and that it was a positive thing as we could reflect on our practice.

At first we had the camera out in the room – everybody had the opportunity to operate it and record activities in the room. This also allowed the children to get used to the camera and feel at ease being recorded. It gave them the opportunity to explore and perform on camera, so when we filmed for our reflection it would be more natural.

The lead teacher and I said we would be filmed first, to enable staff to feel more at ease knowing everyone was involved. We were both videoed and wrote transcripts of our conversations to help with our reflection or self-evaluation – we both found we asked too many questions. We found transcribing the conversations made it easier to reflect as we could read back and consider what we said a little more easily.

Staff were first recorded delivering an activity with which they felt comfortable; for example, one practitioner chose a baking activity. These recordings were to make staff feel at ease so they weren't used for reflection.

Reflective practice

The next step was to film each other; we set a time limit of 2 minutes for each person to be filmed. They then reflected on their practice privately, to give them confidence and help them get used to seeing themselves on tape, knowing no one else was watching or judging them.

Staff were honest with their reflections, then evaluated them and set themselves a target.

Next steps

Some staff feel they would like to be filmed without knowing, as they would feel less self-aware and would get a truer picture of their practice. This is something we plan to do next. Our next step is for them to be filmed and then reflect, in pairs, as some staff were quite hard on themselves and we feel peer-mentoring will increase confidence in abilities. In conclusion, staff have found filming themselves a useful experience, giving opportunities to see strengths in communicating with the children and identifying areas for development.

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Comments from practitioners about being filmed

"Before being filmed, I felt a little nervous about it – how would I look and sound on film? As I was being filmed I tried to imagine that I wasn't, and carried on as if it wasn't there. It felt a little embarrassing when watching the playback; however, I now know how my practice is effective and am also looking at areas for development."

"Although I didn't like the idea of being filmed and having to watch it back, I found this a useful way to reflect on my own practice. Watching the film play back wasn't as bad as I though it would be and I was able to see where improvements could be made. "

"I was a little nervous about being filmed as I felt I had to think more about what I was doing with the children instead of it coming naturally to me. I also felt like I was staged and I couldn't be myself during the filming. I learned, after looking back at myself, that I ask the children too many questions, and that some of them are silly. I plan to ask more open-ended questions to encourage communication."

Darlington: Developing language-rich environments

When ELCs in Darlington identified that some of the setting environments lacked creativity and opportunities for imaginative play, and were not 'language rich environments', this became a focus for a cluster meeting and the setting action plans, including indoor and outdoor learning.

Initially, ELLPs wrote their thoughts about 'What is a language-rich environment?' These were shared and collated, to create observation sheets listing the key elements of a language-rich environment. The observation sheets were then used as prompts for a visit by each ELLP to another setting in the LA, previously identified as having good practice.

ELLPs used the prompts and their own observations to create a journal of their own individual ECAT learning journey, which formed part of their audit of provision. Each ELLP then made a presentation to the rest of the group about the creation of their own language-rich environment, the role of the adult and the resulting learning stories.

Evaluation and feedback from ELLPs demonstrated the powerful impact of visiting other settings. This informed the follow-up training, 'Living in a box', about setting up a language-rich environment from scratch, linked to a visit to a playgroup. The success of the visits has led to more reciprocal visits between ELLPs, with opportunities to showcase achievements.

When audits have been completed, ELLPs have been able to identify more clearly the places where 'language' is not taking place and address this in their action planning. This is reflected in the ELLP journals, which have been key to the learning process.

The 'Talking hotspots' activity identified that writing and mark-making areas are often places with missed opportunities for talking. Practitioners discussed the ways in which these areas could be developed to promote more talking: creating more space in the area so that it became a workshop where children could choose from a variety of resources, which could also be used there or throughout the setting. The role of the adult was identified as crucial, giving opportunities for modelling, extending vocabulary and discussing children's interests through their ideas and representations. The need for training on a more creative approach to mark-making was identified and discussions are taking place with a setting to work with an artist on a creative mark-making project. Many of the settings identified that mark-making experiences outdoors offer fantastic opportunities for talk that could be developed further indoors The Sightlines company has been working with the settings in the local woods and then continuing the themes within the setting. In the image, the children are using charcoal to mark-make in a tent, following on from their discovery of charcoal in the woods.

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Children drawing with charcoal Image courtesy of Sightlines Initiatives

"I feel that being an ELLP is a very important role as language is a key part of child's development; without language children will have difficulties developing in other areas. I am enjoying my role as an ELLP and find it very rewarding, working closely with the children to understand how they are all developing at different stages. The training I have been given has been very informative and interesting, especially the recent session. This helped my understanding of the child language development records that I have been doing with my key group. I found these a little bit difficult, to start with, but after talking to the ELC and speech therapist I feel I can complete these on all my key children. I feel that I would be able to help parents and other staff if they felt a child had difficulties and give them the support they need.

The management and nursery team have been very helpful and supportive and I know that if any difficulties were to arise I would have their full support to help me."

Manchester ELLP

Training

The next three case studies focus particularly on training.

Training has featured in many of the previous case studies. Appropriate, ongoing training, identified through audits, for ELLPs and practitioners, is an integral part of ECAT. The training may come from a range of external training providers or it may be bespoke training developed by LAs for individual settings or groups of practitioners. Key qualities that are essential to all training include:

● high-quality training, accessible to all participants;

● tailored to practitioners' needs;

● rigorously evaluated and developed as a result of evaluation;

● impact followed up by ELCs on setting visits;

● part of the whole ECAT experience – not seen in isolation

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Newham: Adult–child interaction (ACI) techniques

Following the training audit in Newham, ELCs and ELLPs identified the need for training for practitioners about strategies to help children develop communication skills. Here the ELCs describe how they developed and delivered this training to range of practitioners.

ELCs developed a training package that covered speech and language development and adult–child interaction techniques and strategies. The aims of the training were for practitioners to have:

● some knowledge of adult–child Interaction (ACI) techniques;

● reflected on different child and adult communication skills and interaction styles;

● practised and developed their skills in carrying out ACI techniques;

● increased knowledge of children's language development;

● increased knowledge of when and how to refer children with speech and language difficulties.

All of the targeted PVI settings and children's centres released the whole staff team for this training, as part of the LA's commitment to ongoing continuing professional development (CPD). In order to receive a nursery education grant, all settings are expected to identify two closure days per year, and all children's centres three days, to enable whole-staff training. One of these days was identified for language training. Some schools experienced difficulties releasing the whole staff team, so they nominated delegates with a brief for dissemination. All of the schools released the ELLP as well as staff working in the nursery and Reception. We trained the teachers at two schools and, in September, shall use the same training to go on to train teaching assistants and nursery nurses and any other staff whom they feel would benefit. In some cases training for schools occurred over two sessions.

We carried out pre- and post-training questionnaires. Before the training, we asked them to name any strategies that they already use with children to support their talking, and also to watch a video of an adult and child interacting, observing any skills that the adult is using. After the training, we asked the staff what strategies they will now use, as well as watching the video again and recording any of the ACI strategies that they observe.

We trained 194 staff in 20 settings. Before the training the staff identified 362 strategies; after the training they identified 990 (a 173% increase). This increase was as a direct result of the training and the opportunities to share good practice within the group. The training will be followed up by ELC visits to settings and support in carrying out the ACI strategies by videoing and observing each other.

Some feedback from staff

> *"I will follow the child's lead instead of saying, 'Don't do this.' I will let them explore more, as that's how they learn."*

> *"This training was really useful in making me aware of how much talking I actually do – I will definitely wait more now before I jump in asking questions."*

> *"Adding language is such a simple technique that I will try it on some of the children."*

Nottinghamshire: Learning to talk, talking to learn

The ECAT team in Nottinghamshire decided to build on lessons learned from an earlier project – 'Learning to talk, talking to learn', as well as their buddying project, to inform their practice. (Buddying is a DCSF initiative that facilitates shared learning between leaders and staff across settings, in order to support better transition, particularly between settings and schools.)

We are using what we have learnt from the project in our ECAT programme and shall be using ECAT as a vehicle for universal roll-out of the key elements of the project. We are involved in a 'buddying'

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project throughout the children's centres and many of our teachers have become buddies, enabling the coaching and mentoring strand of the project to continue.

In 2007, the SLT department and the LA collaborated on the 'Learning to talk, talking to learn' project, to improve the language skills of children in targeted schools. The two-year project ended in July 2009.

The eight agreed objectives included:

- To improve practitioners' subject knowledge of children's language development and develop skills in developing children's expressive language, vocabulary and listening skills.

- To enhance the natural, daily interaction skills of teachers in the targeted settings to improve the children's language skills and establish regular listening and narrative groups in the settings.

In order to achieve the objectives, the key components of the project were:

- attendance at 'Let's interact' training – a course based on Hanen principles, delivered over three half-days by a SLT and an EYST;

- attendance at 'Listening and narrative' group training, delivered by an SLT and an EYST over two half-days about delivery of nursery narrative groups, developed by the SLT team with a local resource (see reference later);

- opportunity for CPD and support throughout the programme, using a peer-support model from a leading Foundation teacher (LFT), selected on the basis of excellent practice in early years and paired with teachers from the targeted Foundation units. (The LA was very keen for this model to be adopted, although we had some reservations. As it transpires, the time invested in training the LFTs was invaluable and proved to be one of the most powerful elements of the project.)

Results

The comprehensive project evaluation included the use of questionnaires, interim reports, British Picture Vocabulary Scales (BPVS – a test of hearing vocabulary for standard English) results and Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) data and had very positive outcomes.

We were particularly pleased to show changes in the interaction skills of practitioners. Participants were asked to tally the number of times they used these strategies in video-clips taken at the start of the course and then again at the end of the course. Results showed that practitioners increased the number of times they waited for a response, repeated something that child said or did, and commented on what a child was doing. They decreased the number of times they asked a question (dramatically) and directed the child.

However, the most important outcome was the impact it had on developing children's language. Children were assessed at the start of the project on the BPVS and 30% seemed to have language delay. On re-assessment nine months later, only 9% had language delay, which is in line with national indicators of prevalence of language delay. We are heartened to think that this group of children's language delay was environmental and they can catch up, given the right input in the EYFS – it is not too late.

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Section 5: The journey continues

Everyone involved in ECAT – ELCs, ELLPs, parents and children – will be on a different route on their journey towards 'Every Child a Talker'.

The case studies presented here have focused on parts of the effective practice going on in each LA with particular focus on children, parents or practitioners.

This final case study celebrates the journey of all these people in one LA, and will probably be very familiar to those who are making similar journeys now.

Telford and Wrekin: Empowering and motivating practitioners, parents and children to maximise speech, language and communication opportunities delivered through the ECAT programme

From the outset, the emphasis within Telford and Wrekin's ECAT programme has been to value all involved as researchers in a new project. The ELLPs have been co-constructors of the ECAT programme and have proved a rich resource, offering a huge range of experiences, enthusiasms and training, skills and local knowledge.

ECAT cluster meetings are forums where the differences and similarities in experience between practitioners from different sectors of early years provision have sometimes proved challenging. The important responsibility for each ELLP to develop their awareness of their own speech, language and communication skills within the group meetings was emphasised and supported from the outset

ELLPs have been asked to contribute careful evaluations of all aspects of the programme. The content of these evaluations has been acted upon in a transparent way wherever possible. For example, the comments from ELLPs about some of their experiences of being assessed highlighted the need to support the development of a supportive and sensitive working group, where children's abilities and needs were also central. As a response to this, a part of each cluster meeting has been devoted to sharing some inspirational work by children within a local setting and this has been highly valued.

Getting started

The audits of provision exercises, suggested in the ECAT materials (Enabling Environments, Learning and Development, Positive Relationships and The Unique Child) formed an important first step in the professional development of the ELLPs. The ELLPs mostly worked together with their staff teams to accumulate the information needed, and they reported that this process supported the teams to come together and share perspectives in a way in which they each felt valued.

The audits triggered a heightened awareness of noticing speech, language and communication within the settings and motivated informed plans for developments. These developments were related to the environment, the routines, the behaviour of practitioners and the relationships with parents and carers.

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The setting plans were incentivised with some ECAT funding that, at the early stages of the programme, seemed very important to the ELLPs and the settings. Interestingly, over time, as these plans have been transformed into reality, the ELLPs have highlighted that it is the reflective approach that has been the more important key to development, rather than having money to spend.

Each development has been led by each ELLP and has been locally responsive and therefore unique. The progress of these projects formed the fourth full day cluster meeting, five months into the programme, where each ELLP shared their ideas and experiences with the group and the National Strategies Regional Adviser. This formed a recognition and celebration of progress and affirmed to the group the tremendous resource that they represent.

Growing confidence

The ECAT practitioner-confidence questionnaire, completed at the outset of the programme and then again during the fourth cluster meeting, demonstrated significant development for every ELLP. This data, together with recently completed ECAT parental questionnaires, offer food for thought for the ELLPs and will inform next steps.

In parallel to the above process, the ELLPs have gradually increased their confidence and skills in monitoring individual children's stages of speech, language and communication development. Working on the monitoring and associated observations has generated much discussion within both settings and the ELLP group. Although undertaking this process has been demanding, it was greatly helped by starting with The Unique Child ECAT audit; the ELLPs have also found sessions led by a speech and language therapist particularly helpful. The next stage of the programme, together with mentoring, is the ELKLAN training 'Let's Talk with Under 5s'.

Impact on practitioners, children and parents

Practitioners appear to have very rapidly come to respect and trust children as creators of their own learning and development. They are recognising that a heavy proportion of time focused on adult-directed activities where children's input of answering specific questions is of limited benefit to children themselves. Practitioners appear to be valuing the children in a new light. The shift in behaviour that practitioners feel they are making, purposefulness, care with eye contact, positioning, gesturing, listening, clarity of language, timing and responsiveness, all appear to be having profound effects.

The ELLPs have made considered alterations and enhancements to their physical environments, to expand and enrich possibilities for shared speech, language and communication and to recognise and value the places children choose to chat, throughout their settings, indoors and out.

The ELLPs have highlighted children who they have felt are less visible to them, perhaps appearing quiet, in the background, as well as children who they feel may be at risk of delay. It has been noted that just making these children known and visible within staff teams has resulted in significant developments for many of them.

There has been a wide range of activities raising awareness of ECAT with parents, each tailored to the needs of the parents within individual settings, for example, displays, newsletters to parents and ECAT stalls at fairs and parents evenings. Practitioners have drawn parents' attention to developments in provision that have been ECAT-inspired and also sometimes funded, such as 'talking-friendly spaces'. The process of sharing these changes with parents and encouraging them, together with their children, to experience these has supported the ECAT message. ELLPs and key persons have used the ECAT child-monitoring information to inform their discussions with parents about their child. They have discussed where practitioners and families can work together most helpfully to support the child The aim is to share the thinking behind any developments and inspire

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parents to recognise and act upon opportunities to support their own children's speech, language and communication, beyond the setting and in the home, and to feel ownership of their ideas.

The impact has been a shared and heightened awareness and a stronger approach to working together. All settings will be further developing their partnership with parents as part of the future focus on parental engagement.

Where to next?

Some questions for reflection as the ECAT journey continues

- How is ECAT helping practitioners to get better at communicating with children?

- How do you know that ECAT is having an impact on the children in your LA or setting?

- Have you reconsidered your feelings about silence since being involved in ECAT?

- How do you know whether ECAT has had an impact on the way in which parents communicate with their children?

- How has ECAT helped you to consider the connections between language and thought and language and play?

- What keys to ECAT do everyone need to keep ECAT going when it is no longer funded?

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References

Thanks are due to the Early Language consultants, the Early Language lead practitioners, the parents and children from the following local authorities.

Bradford	Kirklees	Sunderland
Bournemouth	Liverpool	Telford and Wrekin
Brent	Luton	Waltham Forest
Darlington	Manchester	Westminster
Durham	Newham	Wokingham
Hackney	Nottinghamshire	Wolverhampton
Haringey	Oxfordshire	
Hounslow	Rotherham	

Websites

Within the case studies references have been made to several organisations that support ECAT and provide training and language support. For more information see the websites listed below.

Bookstart www.bookstart.org.uk

Bookstart is a national programme that encourages all parents and carers to enjoy books with their children from as early an age as possible.

Communication Friendly Spaces™ www.elizabethjarmanltd.co.uk/dvd.php

CfS focuses on the role of the learning environment in supporting the development of speaking and listening skills and runs training that supports practitioners to understand how the physical space connects with and supports their pedagogy.

The Communication Trust www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

The purpose of The Communication Trust is to raise awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication across the children's workforce and to enable practitioners to access appropriate training and expertise. The Communication Trust was founded by Afasic, BT Better World Campaign, Council for Disabled Children (CDC) and I CAN, who now form the programme board. Recently Scope and The Children's Society joined them. This small core group is supported by the Communication Consortium, a number of partners and stakeholders who deliver services to help children communicate.

ELKLAN www.elklan.co.uk

Elklan delivers training packages to help others to promote and support the communication skills of all children, especially those with speech, language and communication needs. Elklan offers accredited courses for those working with children from two to 16 years of age.

Hanen www.hanen.org

The Hanen Centre, a Canadian charitable organisation, is committed to helping all young children, including those who have language delays, communicate effectively by supporting their parents, teachers and caregivers. Their 'Learning Language and Loving It' course is widely used.

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ICAN www.ICAN.org.uk

This website provides access to a range of services that help professionals from across the children's workforce to better support children's communication needs and helps parents access the information that they need to support their child. I CAN runs a campaign called Make Chatter Matter.

London Specialist Interest Group (SIG) Bilingualism
www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk

This website includes a wide range of resources for speech and language therapists working with children and families from diverse communities.

Sightlines Initiative www.sightlines-initiative.com

Sightlines Initiative advocates and demonstrates the development of creative and reflective early years pedagogy in the UK, through action research projects, mentoring and consultancy. It has close links with the schools of Reggio Emilia through its hosting of the Refocus network.

Talk for meaning www.talk4meaning.co.uk

This website gives information about ECAT in Luton, and practical ideas for language development. It is run by Michael Jones who is an independent consultant, with a speech and language therapy and teaching background, who is currently the ELC in Luton.

Talk to Your Baby www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby

Talk to Your Baby is a campaign run by the National Literacy Trust to encourage parents and carers to talk more to children from birth to age three. TTYB has recently produced 'Guidance for developing a strategic approach to speech, language and communication in the early years'.

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