

What impact does the Nuffield Early Language Intervention have on children's attainment in speaking?

Orchard Primary School, EYFS

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of an early language intervention and the impact it had on pupil progress in speaking. Specific time was allocated to the running of this intervention in order to measure the rate of success and assess what improvements can improve efficiency in subsequent years.

A focus group method was used through which children were selected for participation based on an initial speech and language screening. Six children participated in three group sessions per week run by a trained teaching assistant. Data was collected using Wellcomm screening, class data, scrutiny of dictated speech from sessions and feedback from class teachers. The results demonstrated that 66% (four out of the six children) made more than expected progress and all children made at least expected progress.

Introduction

Orchard School is a vibrant and diverse primary situated in the London Borough of Hackney. Pupils, who range in age from three to eleven, arrive at the school with relatively low starting points. A high proportion of children have English as an additional language and there are a higher-than-average number of children who qualify for free school meals. Despite this, at the end of Key Stage two, children perform significantly better than the national averages in reading, writing and maths.

There are approximately 1.4 million children who have a speech and language difficulty in the U.K. Evidence shows that there are close links between areas of deprivation and language development. However, some children can overcome these difficulties if the right support is put in place, (I Can, 2021).

Evaluation of the speech and language provision across the school has resulted in the school budgeting for and recruiting a speech and language specific teaching assistant. The rationale behind this was to improve intervention consistency, assessment accuracy and to ensure all group teaching resulted in a secure progression over the agreed run time. The identified teaching assistant has received regular training from a Speech and Language Therapist and leads all intervention groups for EYFS, KS1 and KS2.

Orchard Primary School has invested in early interventions across a number of years to help children overcome difficulties in speech and language. All children in Reception benefit from Launchpad screening and identified children access Launchpad for Language sessions run by a qualified Speech and Language Therapist. The Launchpad programme is a universal approach to supporting all the children in class to reach their communication, listening and attention potential based on the Early Years Foundation Stage principles. The Department for Education state that *'the development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development'* (2020) and the rapid progress children make as a result of language intervention has resulted in historical data demonstrating significant gap closure for identified pupils receiving support.

The Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme is designed to help young children overcome language difficulties and consists of small group and individual sessions. The programme specifically targets vocabulary, narrative skills, active listening and phonological awareness and provides a 'next step' to the Launchpad programme already in place. The Department for Education (DfE) has worked with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to assess the effectiveness of the programme and, following a trial, found that children made on average 3 months additional progress in language, (EEF, 2020). Subsequently, the DfE has since provided NELI to primary schools free of charge.

Research Process

Reception children participated in baseline assessment in the first three weeks of the Autumn Term using the Wellcomm screening material. This was administered by trained staff in the Reception classes. Next, based on score analysis, children were organised into groups for Launchpad and NELI interventions. The lower performing children were placed in the Launchpad groups and the next six children selected for the NELI group.

As a consequence of COVID 19 and a national school partial closure between January and March, children did not attend weekly interventions consistently until the beginning of March 2021 and as a result, the data collection period was shortened to ensure evaluation of outcomes was consistent with continuity of provision. Children took part in three group and one individual session per week. Sessions are pre planned as part of a handbook structure which the staff member follows. The group starts with listening skills and outlining the rules for the session. Next, the children focus on vocabulary with the aim is to revise words that were covered in the previous two sessions. Children then work on a narrative task which helps to develop their story-telling skills. Samples of their dictated work were collected by the teaching assistant.

After eight weeks, the children were reassessed using the same Wellcomm screening material, this time administered by Speech and Language therapists.

Findings

Two sets of data were compared – baseline and end point data from WellComm assessment and teacher assessment related to the speaking and listening strand. It is clear that there is a correlation between the Wellcomm screening results and the end of term teacher assessment. Four of the six children made better than expected progress in speaking and two made expected progress in both sets of data collection.

| Name of child | Baseline EYFS Data | Summer EYFS Data |
|---------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Aa | Below | Expected |
| Me | Below | Expected |
| Al | Expected | Exceeding |
| Ma | Expected | Expected |
| Ay | Below | Expected |
| Yo | Expected | Expected |

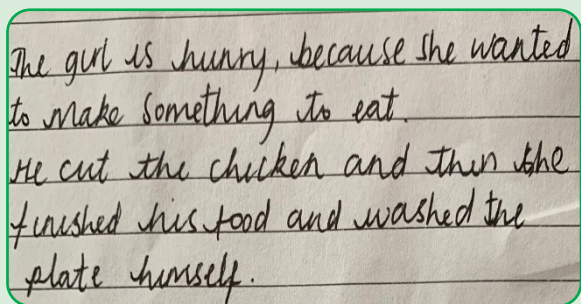
Fig. 1. Orchard Primary School EYFS Teacher assessed data

| Name of child | Score 1 (04/11/2020) | Score 2 (21/06/2021) | Baseline | Summer |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Aa | Green at section 7 | Green at section 9 – age expected | Below | Expected |
| Me | Green at section 7 | Green at section 8 – score increased | Below | Expected |
| Al | Green at section 7 | Green at section 9 – age expected | Expected | Exceeding |
| Ma | Green at section 7 | Green at section 8 – score increased | Expected | Expected |
| Ay | Green at section 7 | Green at section 8 – score increased | Below | Expected |
| Yo | Green at section 8 | Green at section 8 – maintained | Expected | Expected |

Fig. 2. Wellcomm Screening results

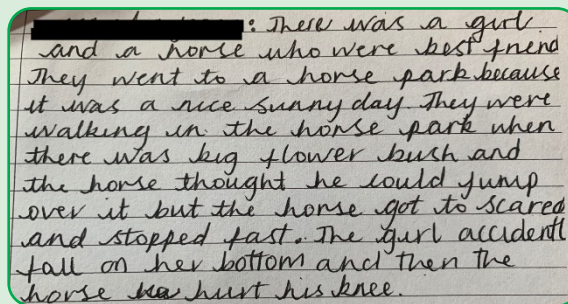
As both data sets have shown consistency this increases the accuracy validation of the intervention impact. Examples of dictated work were also collected and scrutinised. A piece was taken during their very first session and again after eight weeks.

Start of intervention:



The girl is hurry, because she wanted to make something to eat. He cut the chicken and then she finished his food and washed the plate himself.

End of intervention:



There was a girl and a horse who were best friend. They went to a horse park because it was a nice sunny day. They were walking in the horse park when there was big flower bush and the horse thought he could jump over it but the horse got to scared and stopped fast. The girl accidently fall on her bottom and then the horse was hurt his knee.

Fig. 3. Child Yo March 2021

Fig 3 comparison of the narrative text shows that the child's language developed to include more examples of conjunctions, adjectives and noun phrases, verbs and more specific vocabulary choices. This was typical of all dictated samples analysed.

Three of the children in the group were working below the expected level and following this intervention, had moved into the expected level. This is roughly in line with the progress children made in the EEF study. This has resulted in all of the children leaving EYFS at either expected or above.

Impact and Conclusion

Whilst the evidence concludes that the children who participated in the NELI programme made progress in speaking, some children made more rapid progress than others. The programme did not run consistently for a full twenty weeks meaning that the data collected shows a snapshot picture rather than a progressive evaluation. In order to ensure the intervention has sustained impact and concise evaluation, there are some things to be considered and adjusted in school delivery.

- The accuracy of the initial screening (undertaken by school staff) and subsequent group selection could be improved by a trained speech and language teacher undertaking both baseline and end point assessments.
- A full twenty week programme needs to be implemented, data collected and analysed to look for trends and impact. The EEF trials found that NELI was even more effective when run over thirty weeks and spanning both Nursery and Reception (EEF, 2020). There is potential for the programme to have an even greater impact at Orchard if children can be identified even earlier.

References

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