Early Years Hub Project Evaluation
Holy Rosary Teaching School Alliance
Sefton Local Authority
Introduction:
Sefton sits next to Liverpool and stretches from inner city Bootle, a significantly deprived area, to coastal Southport. The latter has large Eastern European and Traveller communities.

Children who enter school with poor language and communication skills are significantly less likely to achieve success in later life than their more advanced peers. Thus, providing a language-boosting environment in early years settings is one of the most effective things we can do to improve children’s life-chances (e.g. Hart & Risley, 1995). Poor language has a substantial negative effect on school achievement, children’s behaviour, mental health, and on employability (Gross, 2016).

However, disadvantaged children with good vocabulary at age five are significantly more likely to ‘buck the trend’ and escape poverty in later life (Bladen, 2006). This means that providing a language-boosting environment in early years settings is one of the most effective things we can do to improve children’s life-chances (e.g. Hart & Risley, 1994).

In keeping with the vision of the Merseyside Project, a partnership was established in Sefton between Maintained Nursery Schools and the School Readiness Service, with a view to facilitating the development of a framework for system led quality improvement. In Sefton, Early Years Providers has an established strong partnership with Sefton School Readiness Team. A communication and language focus has been a priority for some time and developments include:

- A tiered training pathway
- A recently developed pathway for a language champion in each setting
- A pilot using WellComm as a screening tool for Communication and Language had been completed with two Children Centres and providers in their reach
- Launch of Five to Thrive (5TT) across all sectors and professionals (480 practitioners and professionals)
- A pilot using Elklan as a high quality training tool for trained language champions
- Lead Language Champions – setting-based trained language practitioners were seconded to School Readiness one day a week (November 2015 – July 2016) to mentor and coach other language champions on developing good practice
- A hub system for collaboration and sharing of practice
- A Communication Matters Project establishing Communication Settings with accreditation, was running parallel to this project

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1 ‘How effective is language and communication training in early years settings?’ A report for Sefton School Readiness Team 20.06.16 Caroline Rowland, Lauren Kidd, ESRC LuCiD Centre, University of Liverpool. Including SPEAK survey
Sefton therefore wanted to optimise the established School Readiness partnership, support and challenge approach and expand the partnership model to include providers working with the four Nursery Schools.

Three of the Nursery Schools are located in the South end of Sefton a significantly deprived area incorporating Bootle and Litherland, and the fourth Nursery is located in the North of Sefton - Southport – an area with a mixed catchment including high levels of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and a rapidly growing migrant community.

**Purpose:**
The overall purpose of the project was to improve the quality of provision to support children’s communication and language in Private, Voluntary and Independent settings in order to secure consistency in the quality of provision across sectors, thus improving outcomes for children.

Children’s communication remains a key priority as a significant number of children start the Free Entitlement for 2 and 3 year olds with language below the expected level for their age. For a number of children this delay is as a result of a specific language difficulty, however for many children, delayed language development arises as a result of limited adult interactions and/or stimulation.

The target group for the purpose of this project did not include children already identified with specific language difficulty, and the setting based focus was on the improvement of staff expertise and confidence in accelerating communication in their setting and at home.

As highlighted, the Sefton project is being delivered through the four nursery schools in Sefton: Cambridge, Crossens, Greenacre and SandDunes in partnership with Sefton School Readiness Team and support from a Sefton Speech & Language Therapist.

Private, Voluntary and Independent Settings (PVI) were selected on the number of 2 Year Old Offer Children and grouped into locality phases. A total of 40 PVI were invited to participate, and 30 accepted, 4 declined 6 did not respond.

The aims /objectives of the project:

- To enable a teaching school via four nursery schools, to work together with support from School Readiness, to deliver quality improvement for communication and language in early years provision, and create the infrastructure locally to support this in a sustainable way
- For all partners in Early Years to be able to learn from each other in order to provide better early education and care for children and families, and support effective transitions from nursery into primary
- To build on an already established communication and language pathway within Sefton, utilising skills, knowledge and expertise of trained Language Champions from Settings and staff within Nursery Schools in partnership with Sefton’s School Readiness Team. For all sectors to develop a rich and coherent communication and language policy and practice.
• To continue to embed key principles of the Five to Thrive approach within everyday practice in settings and schools particularly in relation to practitioner behaviours
• To build on the existing Children’s Centre Hub approach in developing a holistic and cohesive strategy in improving outcomes for children’s communication and language development, measured using the WellComm screening tool
• To facilitate networks to support best practice in both language development and Five To Thrive
• To continue to develop a quality language approach for use across sectors to ensure consistency for children and families
• To promote parental participation in supporting their children’s communication and language development and in using the key principles of Five to Thrive to promote healthy brain development
• To participate in a pilot with Iram Siraj using the SSTEW Scales for well-being and involvement. Enabling leaders to use the rating scale for self-evaluation and improvement, audit and regulation

Project Design:
The Intervention
Each of the 4 nursery schools worked with between 7-8 PVI settings alongside the School Readiness Service. Five Leads from the Nursery Schools and School Readiness were also trained by Iram Siraj on SSTEW and ECERS Rating Scales.

• WellComm packs were purchased; training and individual child level assessment process was implemented across Sefton PVI settings and Maintained Nursery Schools on the project (May 2015- June 2016)
• Elklan and Language Champion training was planned, delivered, and accessed by key staff across the sector. This was delivered by a Sefton Speech and Language Therapist on secondment to the School Readiness Service one day a week
• 5 Leads were trained by Iram Siraj in using SSTEW/ECERS Rating Tool and assessed 20 settings: this was split between 11 intervention settings which were accessing the project and 9 control settings who had little or no development in language.
• SSTEW and ECERS assessments were used to evaluate the quality of provision and plan interventions and support
• Lead Language Champions, alongside Quality Improvement Officers supported capacity issues in delivering training in WellComm and support with the WellComm assessments

Outcome measures:
A number of outcome measures were utilised throughout the period of the project, which are highlighted in greater depth below:
1. Pre/post School Readiness Language Star Evaluation Ratings
2. Pre/post WellComm assessments using the School Readiness format
3. Pre/post SSTEW/ECERS Rating audit and assessment scores
1. **Pre/post Language Star evaluation ratings (Appendix 1):**

A communication and language evaluation star was devised by the School Readiness Service to measure distance travelled in practitioners learning as a result of training and support. Nursery schools shared the Star with providers during their initial contacts.

The Star evaluation looked at:

- How knowledgeable practitioners are in understanding children’s communication and language development?
- How confident practitioners are in supporting colleagues in settings to develop quality practices to develop children’s communication and language?
- If children’s communication and language development is assessed?
- Whether providers were using WellComm to support communication and language in their setting?
- How providers rated their partnership with parents in sharing children’s communication and language development?

2. **Pre/post WellComm assessments**

A small pilot had already taken place prior to the Merseyside Project in Sefton using WellComm as a screening tool with a small number of Children Centres and PVI settings in their reach hub. Initial results and impact on practice looked promising and as a result WellComm was selected as a tool for use in the Project. The School Readiness Service adapted the recording of assessments for use by settings to include pre/post data. Staff in the nursery schools and settings were trained by School Readiness and Sefton Speech and Language Therapist to use the WellComm screening tool. Nursery school staff and School Readiness staff then trained providers on the project and supported implementation. Pre and Post child assessments were measured, data was collected and an evaluation of the tool on impact of practitioner knowledge and behaviours were gathered anecdotally.

3. **Pre/post SSTEW/ECERS Rating audit and assessment scores**

Five leaders in each Local Authority on the Merseyside Project were trained over 5 days by Iram Siraj at Everton Childhood Centre. All 5 leaders were engaged in a robust external moderation process to ensure consistency in assessments and judgements. This was validated to ensure external moderation by the North Liverpool Teaching School. All 5 leaders achieved ‘Gold Standard’. The Trainers were then able to use the rating tool across the project settings. An initial assessment took place in 22 settings during November 2015 – January 2016. PVI providers were scored across a number of the rating scales particularly chosen to support the
aims of the project. Settings were divided into Intervention Group (those settings that had accessed the project and School Readiness Language Pathway), and a Control group (those providers with little or no access to language development). The Control group were given a very brief feedback after the assessment. Whereas the Intervention group were given feedback and invited to a training session, of which 50% attended. An end of project re-assessment was carried out during June 2016.

4. Liverpool University Research Evaluation
In partnership with Liverpool University a small research project was initiated to evaluate the impact of training on practitioner knowledge and therefore outcomes for children.²

The study involved 2 groups of settings – one which had accessed training and support in language and communication and another control group which had had little or no development in this area.

It explored whether simply training practitioners to use language boosting techniques is ultimately effective in changing their behaviour. In other words, do busy early years practitioners remember the training advice they were given, and implement it faithfully when talking and playing with children? This is an important evidence-gap, because if local authorities and settings are to pay for language and communication training they need to know that it is going to be effective at changing practitioner behaviour and, ultimately, impact on children’s language.³

5. School Readiness Quality Improvement Officers - Monitoring Language Visits
School Readiness Quality Improvement Officers (QIO) monitored impact in settings, using aspects from SSTEW/ECERS Rating Scale concentrating on books, storytelling, planning and practitioner behaviour selected as initial starting points.⁴

6. Anecdotal evidence and photographic evidence
A range of anecdotal evidence was collected over the course of the project from language champions, practitioners, managers and leaders on the project.

Photographic evidence was utilised to demonstrate the impact on:
- practice and changes in universal provision,
- a more knowledgeable approach to language and communication development
- targeted intervention work using WellComm and Elklan approaches

²SSTEW/ECERS – Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-Being – Iram Siraj, Denise Kingston & Edward Melhuish

³‘How effective is language and communication training in early years settings?’ A report for Sefton School Readiness Team 20.06.16 Caroline Rowland, Lauren Kidd, ESRC LuCiD Centre, University of Liverpool. Including SPEAK survey

⁴SSTEW/ECERS – Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-Being – Iram Siraj, Denise Kingston & Edward Melhuish
Power of Professional Collaboration

‘Even a dozen years ago few would have predicted the amount of collaboration and mutual support in the … system today. The shift from competition to collaboration, from top-down control to organisational autonomy has been quite remarkable. So too has been the emergence of the role of “system leader” – someone in a leadership capacity who is as concerned about the progress of another school, college, children’s centre or early years setting as they are about their own’ David Hopkins.\(^5\)

The Sefton School Readiness Service had already invested in sector leadership and professional collaboration through ‘Good Practice Leads’, School Readiness Hubs and a variety of project opportunities. During the course of this project, exemplar setting-based language champions were seconded as Lead Language Champions for one day per week and supported capacity issues in WellComm training and assessment screening.

Joint practice development occurred via:
- Integrated collaboration for training delivery,
- WellComm screening and planning interventions
- Data collection and analysis

Peer-to-Peer support was evidenced via:
- SSTEW assessment moderation process between the 5 leads
- Nursery School staff visiting PVI providers – modelling, supporting and sharing good practice
- Lead language Champions supporting other language champion in their setting and reciprocal visiting to each other’s settings
- Mentoring and coaching opportunities across sectors and within sectors

The project itself has created a springboard for future professional working between School Readiness and the Nursery Schools with opportunities to develop further initiatives to embed practice developed during the course of the project. Lead Language Champion support was viewed by settings as a positive informal and practical approach.

\(^5\)The emergence of system leadership – David Hopkins 2009
Project Outcomes:

1. Language Star Evaluation (Appendix 2):

Summary table:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Improvement score</th>
<th>% Improvement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Knowledge</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Confidence</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Assessing language</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<td>4 WellComm</td>
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<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Parents</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21%</td>
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(Total score possible per question = 4 x 14 settings = 56)

A total of 14 providers returned the pre/post Star Evaluations.

All providers reported an improvement during the pre to post project. This ranged from:

- 21% improvement for question 5 (relating to work with parents) to
- 46% improvement for use of WellComm as a screening tool, and
- 38% improvement in assessment processes for language development

Findings:

- As settings in Sefton have accessed previous training and support in working with parents (PEAL/REAL), they were already fairly confident in this area of practice, hence the improvement gain was less
- The biggest gains were found in using WellComm as many settings had not accessed the tool before and this led to a 38% improvement in assessing language development specifically
- All settings found WellComm a useful tool and reported that they were likely to continue to use it

2. WellComm Screening (Appendix 3 Anecdotal evidence):

The use of WellComm as a screening tool was a new initiative for all the nursery schools and many of the providers. Therefore time was taken up with purchasing packs and delivering training before the screening could take place.

Crossens Nursery Reach – North Sefton:

This data relates to 54 N2 - Leavers

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Below</td>
<td>In Line</td>
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<td>11%</td>
<td>87%</td>
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Cambridge, Greenacre and SandDunes Reach – South Sefton:

This data relates to 308 N2 – Leavers

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<tr>
<th>ARE On Entry</th>
<th>ARE – On Exit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below</td>
<td>In Line</td>
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<td>31%</td>
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Findings:
The data from both South and North Sefton demonstrates considerable impact on children’s progress during the period of the project. Overall 72% of children made expected or better progress. The % of children by the end of the project were deemed to be below ARE (Age Related Expectations) had reduced from 21% to 10%:

- All children made progress
- All settings reported an improvement in the data from initial to second assessment
- Initial assessments surprised many staff either because a child who presented as verbally confident/mature did not achieve as highly as expected, or because a child who presents as less confident or ‘quiet’ achieved higher results than their peers
- Several gaps in practice were identified where staff had assumed understanding: pronouns -he/she; position words; meaning of nose, ears i.e. to smell with, to hear with etc.
- Settings began to identify more appropriate children for screening
- Settings report an increase in staff’s understanding of language development and greater confidence in making judgements
- Within the Crossen’s reach cohort, 5 children have been referred to the Speech and Language Therapy Service (SALT)
- In the Crossen’s reach, the identification of a child as ‘above’ on entry may have been due to an inaccurate initial assessment

WellComm:

We have found WellComm to be a useful tool to assess individual children and as an additional form of evidence when completing trackers. It has been especially beneficial in helping not only to clearly identify children with speech and language delay, but to support their referral and enabled us to provide more targeted support for them whilst on the waiting list. The Big Book of Ideas has been a positive and useful toolkit and we have incorporated activities within our planning for individual children, the group as whole and shared ideas with parents.

We have noted some good progress as a result of this approach. We plan to continue to assess our children from September 2016 and will extend training as necessary.

St Cuthbert’s, Southport
Conclusion and Next Steps:

- Releasing staff to carry out the assessments required a considerable commitment
- Settings that admit children continuously, found it difficult to keep up with assessment’s
- In settings where space was an issue finding a quiet space to carry out assessments was difficult
- Practice was developed after the initial assessment in light of findings and resources were made to support activities. These are beginning to embed into practice across each setting
- Many settings reported feeling more confident in administering the second assessment
- Many settings reported having confidence in the tool to assess children’s language development at a deeper level
- Many settings regarded the process as useful and plan to continue next year
- Some settings intend to use the assessment for specific groups of children: 2YOO and Pre-school in particular rather than for all children
- EYFS assessments are now tighter and more consistent
- Increased confidence in planning to accelerate the progress of children with low level speech, language and communication difficulties. For example (Appendix 4):
  - Development of specific ‘Communication Intervention’ groups in order to provide targeted input to children with delayed communication or who have been identified as being at risk of delay
  - Progress in developing and sustaining a ‘Communication Friendly’ environment within which children have reasons to talk and staff are skilled at eliciting talk from children and in knowing and supporting progress towards the next steps
  - More ‘in-house’ resolutions developed in order to overcome children’s barriers to learning in Communication and Language. For example: increased use of prepositions in dialogue with children
- Use of home / school communication book to provide information to support conversations with key children

Settings reported:

“We are going to start assessing all children in the 2 year room, training all staff and talking to parents about communication and language development”
Bees Knees Nursery, Bootle,

“We used the results from the screening to support areas of understanding for those children who required it. We introduced certain adult focussed activities into different areas of the room during play. Extending on children’s play, adults had ‘good practice pointers’ they were carefully linked into the WellComm questions.”
Anonymous, Sefton LA

“WellComm good for unpicking specific areas”
Cambridge Nursery School, Bootle, Liverpool, Sefton LA

“Once we became more confident with the resources and materials we used a real box and teddies for the position questions because we felt that one of the pictures was slightly misleading”
Greenacre Nursery, Litherland, Liverpool, Sefton LA

“We have really enjoyed using the WellComm Project in our setting. We decided to start with our 2-3 year old room and screened all children that were with us. We were very pleased with how well the children responded to the activities and staff enjoyed having the quality time spent with the children giving us a real chance to explore their understanding of language.”
Hatton Hill, Litherland, Liverpool, Sefton LA
### 3. SSTEW/ECERS Rating:

#### Sefton Summary January 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>SSTEW Pre Total (1-7)</th>
<th>SSTEW Post Total (1-7)</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>ECERS Pre Total (1-7)</th>
<th>ECERS Post Total (1-7)</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Control C/ Intervention I</th>
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**Key:** Intervention Settings

Intervention settings were selected from phase 1&2 of the roll out from the Nursery Schools; they have therefore staff have had involvement in language development and training. The settings were originally selected on the high proportion of two year olds on the offer accessing the provision.

A number of settings were identified as a control group. These were selected on the basis that the setting or staff team had had little or no intervention on language development either from School Readiness or the Nursery Schools when SSTEW/ECERS assessments commenced.

### Findings:

**Control Group (9 providers):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre SSTEW</th>
<th>Post SSTEW</th>
<th>Pre ECERS</th>
<th>Post ECERS</th>
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<tr>
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<td>56%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<td>Good (Scores 5-6)</td>
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<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outstanding (Score 7)</td>
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Intervention Group (11 providers)

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<th>Post SSTEW</th>
<th>Pre ECERS</th>
<th>Post ECERS</th>
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<tr>
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<td>(Scores 1-2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<td>64%</td>
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<td>(Score 3-4)</td>
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<td>Good</td>
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Conclusions

Control Group:
The findings reveal that there was already a difference between the control group and intervention group in terms of starting points. This may indicate that access to a language pathway and intervention for staff was already impacting, resulting in practice for intervention group providers being higher on entry. When looking at SSTEW the percentage of settings scoring ‘Good’ remained the same pre/post audit. However there was some improvement in the less than ‘Good’ group. This was due in part to a number of key factors:

- One setting that had a change of manager mid-project. This manager had previously accessed the language pathway and began to make developments and changes in the new provision which resulted in improvements.
- Another setting had a strong room at pre audit which increased scores for the whole setting. However, on post audit staff from this room had been moved into another room and so practice was beginning to develop across both rooms
- Two settings had been placed on the School Readiness Protocol due to concerns about quality, and as such were receiving support with leadership and management, though not specifically in language development.

ECERS scores show a decrease in number of inadequate and an increase in the percentage scoring satisfactory.
Overall three settings demonstrated lower scores on both Ratings, when repeated, indicating a lack of consistency within the settings.

Intervention Group:
All settings had improved scores in both SSTEW and ECERS ratings – demonstrating that changes were ongoing and improvements were consistent.
There was an increase of 2 or more in four settings, with one setting improving by 3 points in ECERS, moving from a 3 to a 6. This setting had had a change in manager and an existing language champion had accessed and achieved Level 4 Elklan. This highlights the impact and improvement on practice.
Post audit rating, 100% of the Intervention group scored 4 or above for SSTEW of which 73% scored 5+ and 27% scored a 6.
4. Evaluation University of Liverpool and SPEAK survey:
The research study set out to investigate the effectiveness of early years practitioner training in language and communicative development by testing how practitioners implement the techniques they have learnt when playing with children in early years settings. In particular, the effectiveness of the Language Champion training model was tested. In Sefton, Language Champions receive extensive training in language and communicative development, which they then take back to their settings. There, they act as a specialist themselves – cascading information to the rest of the early years team, and acting as a point of contact for queries and advice.

The main aims of the study:
- to test whether early years practitioners, who were situated in a Language Champion (LC) nursery used significantly more language-boosting techniques when interacting with children than practitioners situated in other (non-LC) nurseries
- to test whether trained and untrained practitioners were equally effective at implementing language-boosting techniques with 2-year-olds as with 3-year-olds
- to use a questionnaire – the SPEAK survey – to test whether the practitioners who had received language and communication training knew more about children’s development than practitioners who had received no training

Conclusions:
The results showed that language and communication training is effective both at increasing practitioners’ knowledge of children’s language and communicative development, and at increasing the number of language-boosting techniques they used when interacting with children. Nurseries with trained Language Champions used significantly more language-boosting behaviours than those in other (non-Language Champion) nurseries.

The study also suggests it may not be necessary to train all practitioners to be language and communication experts in order to create communication friendly nurseries. Practitioners who had not received any formal training themselves used more language boosting techniques if they were working in a nursery that had a Language Champion on site. In other words, the Language Champion model, in which Language Champions receive extensive training that they then take back to cascade to the rest of their team, seems to be an effective one.

The research study carried out by University of Liverpool had three main findings:
- a. Early Years practitioners who were situated in a Language Champion (LC) nursery used significantly more language-boosting behaviours when interacting with 2 and 3 year old children than practitioners situated in other (non-LC) nurseries. This effect held even when the training of the practitioners themselves was taken into account.
- b. There was no difference in approach with the two age groups. The practitioners used equal numbers of language-boosting behaviours with 2-year-olds as with 3-year olds.
- c. Practitioners who have had language and communication training know more about children’s development than practitioners who have had no training.
In summary, language and communication training is effective at changing the way practitioners behave when interacting with children. In addition, the practitioners who had received training knew more about children’s development than those who had received no training.

In other words, the Language Champion model, in which Language Champions receive extensive training which they take back to settings to cascade to the rest of their team, seems to be an effective one.

Figure 3, next page, shows the proportion of language boosting behaviour used by practitioners with and without training, in the different nurseries. Practitioners who had not received any formal training themselves (blue bars) used more language boosting behaviours if they were working in a Language Champion nursery. LP
Finally in this section we tested whether the practitioners used fewer language boosting behaviours with 2-year-old than with 3-year-olds (see figure 4). This prediction was not upheld. Though it looks from the figure as if the practitioners in the non-LC nurseries used fewer behaviours with 2-year-olds, this difference was not significant (Main effect of age, $F(1,20) = 1.56, p = .23$, Interaction age x nursery type $F(1,20) = .82, p = .38$).
**SPEAK Survey Results**

The SPEAK survey tested practitioner knowledge of child development, focusing on language and communication.

Forty-four of the practitioners who took part had received some type of language and communication training (e.g. WellComm, Elklan etc). Fourteen of these had also received Language Champion training. Thirty-two had not received any training at all.

Overall:

- The trained practitioners scored significantly higher than the non-trained practitioners ($F(2,73) = 7.49, \ p = .001, \eta^2 = 0.17$). The differences were not large (see figure 1) but they were significant.
- Practitioners who had received Language Champion training scored significantly more highly than practitioners who had received other types of training ($p = .047$).
- Practitioners who had received other types of training scored more highly than those who had received no training ($p < .001$).

![Graph showing mean total scores for different training levels](image-url)
School Readiness Quality Improvement Officer Visits (QIO):
From March 2016 – July 2016 Quality Improvement Visits are focusing on language development in the settings using selected sections from SSTEW and ECERS alongside the School Readiness core priorities in this area.

Findings:
- Heightened focus on communication and language ensured practice development
- All settings welcomed the Book audit
- Managers reported that they would like further training on the whole rating scale
- Using the Rating tool supported consistent approaches with settings across Sefton
- Action Planning was more focused on a specific area of language

Implications for practice:
- Continued focus on language for Autumn term visits
- Each QIO to offer further support on developing aspects of practice highlighted by the rating audit
- QIO to refer settings into Lead Language Champions for project work in developing a particular aspect of communication and language e.g. rhyme time; using WellComm; planning storytelling and book sharing

Barriers and Contributors to Success:
- The project was ambitious, comprising a large number of settings and related projects: WellComm / ECERS and SSTEW / Five to Thrive / Existing Communication Pathway / Moderation / Training / Visits to Settings / Data Collection and Follow Up. This meant that co-ordination of the different elements were problematic and capacity was at times an issue
- Engagement of settings
- Capacity of Nursery Schools and the School Readiness Service
- Capacity of PVI to release staff with tight ratio staffing
- Confusion regarding ‘shared vision’ and ownership of the project
- Movement of staff in PVI settings – this impact was observed in two ways: settings lost expertise during development, but equally settings gained expertise if a language champion later joined as a new member of staff. This led to discrepancies in particular on the SSTEW re-assessment
- Priority issues in PVI settings impacted on the capacity of settings to engage e.g. new management; transition times; new ownership; Ofsted; un-related safeguarding priorities
- Timescales and processes were not consistently followed
- Difficulties for leaders on the project being able to make meetings
- Data gathering timescales needed to be set and adhered to for data consistency
- A range of personally mitigating circumstances occurred towards the end of the project that made timescales difficult to achieve
- In Sefton the Five to Thrive approach was already embedded across many areas of training, planning and assessment and due to the introduction of the SSTEW towards the
final quarter of the project, it became too ambitious to develop anything further at this point

- Important to allocate a project manager on a project of this scale to support capacity issues, timescales and evaluation

The Liverpool University study endorsed Sefton’s language Champion Pathway and the key priorities in the Merseyside Project.

The results from the University study, showed that language and communication training is effective both at increasing practitioners’ knowledge of children’s language and communicative development, and at increasing the number of language-boosting techniques they used when interacting with children.

It also suggests that it may not be necessary to train all practitioners to be language and communication experts in order to create communication friendly nurseries. Practitioners who had not received any formal training themselves used more language boosting techniques if they were working in a nursery that had a Language Champion on site. In other words, the Language Champion model, in which Language Champions receive extensive training that they then take back to cascade to the rest of their team, seems to be an effective one.

**Elklan:**
Building on the established language champion pathway, a further Elklan 10 week course was offered to settings on the project. In total 15 practitioners took part in Elklan 0-5, delivered by Sefton speech and Language Therapist with support from School Readiness. All achieved accreditation at Level 3.

**Findings:**
School Readiness evaluations show that Language Champions find Elklan training to have the most significant impact on changing practice in setting.

On visiting one setting on the project in Bootle, a SLT emailed her findings to the owner: ‘*What is even better practice is to see a child who has been on our waiting list for some time for initial assessment and to find that staff have already used their knowledge (from previous visits and Elklan) to put appropriate strategies in place and begin intervention for language and communication difficulties*’

**Conclusions:**
Sefton School Readiness has continued to invest in Elklan training for Language Champions. It is a highly robust training programme and impact on practice at setting level is becoming more apparent. A parallel project with Talking Matters has enabled Sefton to extend and develop this further through Communication Settings Awards.
Next Steps

A new training programme is currently being devised to continue to develop the Language Champion model and create Communication Settings across sectors.

WellComm as a screening tool and a resource to support not only children’s learning but practitioner knowledge will be offered as a programme to other settings not on the project.

The project instigated a partnership between the School Readiness Service and the Maintained Nursery schools, and also one between the Nursery Schools and the PVI providers. This partnership is developing further still. A Steering Group will be established in September 2016 to review impact and to plan next steps in consolidating work:

- Continue School Readiness QIO focus on Language development
- Training session to be provided for those who took part in the project to share findings and good practice and to discuss moving forward, including the SSTEW Rating Tool
- Plan a celebration event to showcase use of WellComm, practical approaches from Language Champion training and embeddingElklan
- Develop further pathways in language for Nursery school staff
- Sector leadership – A Development Officer has been appointed by the Nursery schools to work 3 days per week on key priorities
- Continue to plan for Elklan training as a powerful tool for developing knowledge and expertise
- Share project findings and impact through School Readiness Hub meetings in each locality with all Sefton Settings and Schools
- From the Steering Group plan developments across Sefton in using SSTEW as a robust self-evaluation tool.

Recommendations

The project was extremely ambitious. Effective tools and training packages have been identified as delivering impact across setting practice. Future projects could be targeted in smaller but specific areas so that consistency and clarity of the project is maintained. Key learning points indicate that:

- Additional capacity and time needed to be allocated to the work, rather than it being an addition to existing workloads
- More funding is required to support the maintained sector to enable outreach work and to contribute to release of staff in both sectors
- The School Readiness Service has a role to play due to established partnerships, training pathways and allocated support with settings
• A planned language model is effective in developing deep level practice and developing a shared understanding across settings

• SSTEW and ECERS Rating Tools offer managers an effective measure for self-evaluation which will ensure continuous setting improvement

References


Gross, J. (2016). *A better start through early language and communication development*

Invited talk, Focus on Language and Communication: A Better Start-Cross Site Learning and Development Event, June 2016, Bradford, UK


Sylva, K & Siraj-Blatchford, I & Taggart, B (2010) *ECERS-E: The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Curricular extension to ECERS-R*

WellComm; A Speech and Language Toolkit for Screening and Intervention in the Early Years: Revised Edition. GL Assessment (2010)

The Emergence of System Leadership – David Hopkins (2009)
Appendix 1:
Outcome Evaluation Star:

1. Knowledge of communication and language
2. Confidence in supporting colleagues
3. Assessing communication and language
4. Using WellComm
5. Partnership with Parents

1-4 score: 1 will be placed on the inside of the star, 4 on the outside
Appendix 2:

Star Evaluation: Pre

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Appendix 3:
Examples of WellComm in practice:

Example of small group planning
From Bee’s Knees Nursery, Bootle, Sefton

Planning for section 6
Understanding functions of body parts
Mind mapping – using a stick man on a large piece of paper having body parts separate for the children to place the body part on the right place on the body
Asking questions about how we use different parts of our body.
What do we use our hands for?
What do we do with our ears?
Prepositions
Using Star Wars and Frozen characters giving children instructions
- put Elsa behind the curtain

Planning for section 7
Opposites
We are going to introduce a pair of concepts big and small we will talk to the children and ask them to think of item’s and place the item under the correct title e.g. Elephant is big and mouse is small we will talk about each concept individually so they have a good understanding then add new opposites
Hard – soft
Big – small
Day – night
First and Last
When lining up for the garden, staff to promote the words first and last
Making a display at children’s eye level of their friends faces- the children to put the label first and last next to the appropriate face
First and last stickers asking the children to stand were first and last is.

Planning for section 8
When questions
When do we board
Putting questions on the board to ask at group time for children to gain confidence in asking themselves
When do we put the light on?
When do we go to bed?
When do we put up an umbrella?
To offer a choice for younger children
Why questions
Choosing a book and to ask different types of questions to the children for them to answer
Room on the broom – Where did the dog find the bow?
Where did the frog find the wand?
Appendix 4:

Practitioner comments

‘We have really enjoyed using the WellComm Project in our setting. We decided to start with our 2-3 year old room and screened all children that were with us. We were very pleased with how well the children responded to the activities and staff enjoyed having the quality time spent with the children giving us a real chance to explore their understanding of language.’

‘The results of the screening did not show any real unexpected results, we had one or two children who displayed a lot more understanding than their key workers originally first thought they had.’

‘We used the results from the screening to support areas of understanding for those children who required it. We introduced certain adult focused activities into different areas of the room during play. Extending on children's play, adults had ‘good practice pointers' they were carefully linked into the WellComm questions.’

‘Staff are using some of the screening tools, and big book of activities to improve CAL for children's development.’

‘We used the activities from the big book to help children achieve green in their age band.’

‘We added some of the activities to our Circle Time planning to help children's understanding.’

‘We are now confident that all our 2-3 year olds moving up to Nursery this September have a good understanding of language and have scored a ‘green’ in their age band.’
Appendix 5: Photographic evidence

Resources made to support WellComm

Language champion display for parents
Key priorities: Phonics for parents

Understanding development

WellComm resources created for universal and targeted activities
Devising WellComm activities and resources

When does the moon come out?
Night

Where do apples come from?
Tesco

Where does it go in the day?
To sleep

Identified gap in learning using WellComm: resources made to enhance provision