

# "Let them talk"



**Evaluation of the Language Enrichment  
Programme of the Ballyfermot Early Years  
Language and Learning Initiative**

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## Executive Summary

The Language Enrichment Programme was established by the Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Initiative through a consortium of schools, early childhood settings and other organisations of which the Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership is the lead agency. This report provides an Evaluation of the Language Enrichment Programme.

### Background and overview of the Language Enrichment Programme

The Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Initiative is one of 11 National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) projects throughout Ireland which provide supports for children from birth to six years. The objectives of the Language Enrichment Programme were agreed through collaboration with the Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Consortium and a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) appointed to undertake the programme in late 2011. The overall Programme aimed to create an environment rich in language. Among the objectives were the:

- transference of skills in facilitating young children's speech, language and communication development to early childhood educators and parents
- delivery of accessible, convenient training and onsite mentoring and
- provision of internal and external evaluation

The Language Enrichment Programme emerged at a time when the importance of early communication is highlighted in Ireland's Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, Aistear<sup>1</sup> and the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, Síolta<sup>2</sup> in addition to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.<sup>3</sup> The Language Enrichment Programme contained three main strands:

1. Three Teacher Talk training sessions (based on the Hanen Programme) and follow up video sessions over one year with early childhood educators.
2. Parent and child educational sessions called "Chatter Matters" which focussed on the development of early communication followed by shared activity with the children. This group was conducted for approximately one hour per week over eight weeks.
3. A 'Listening Group' which was created for a small group of children with the early years educators. This group was delivered immediately after the Parent and Child group and was for approximately one hour per week over eight weeks.

### Literature Review

The importance of speech, language and communication development is addressed from five perspectives as: a right of children, central to children's learning and development, dependant on the kinds of experiences provided to children from birth, crucial to children's life chances, particularly if speech and language difficulties go undiagnosed and a key factor in mitigating educational inequality. The concept of 'extended purposive conversations' is explored. Extended purposive conversations can be clearly identified in the literature as an educational dimension to aspire to in early childhood facilities. The importance of quality in early childhood settings is emphasised. Studies have demonstrated that high quality early childhood settings are characterised by the quality of adult-child verbal interactions through open-ended questioning and extension of children's thoughts, in addition to other factors. The process of intervention delivery is highlighted with a focus on the key principles to consider before using a speech and language intervention. A discussion on the indicators of effective in-service education concludes the literature review.

<sup>1</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2009). *Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education. (2006). *Síolta: The national quality framework for early childhood education*. Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020*. Dublin: DES, p.10.

## Methodology

There are four settings included in the evaluation. These settings were the first to participate in the Language Enrichment Programme. Three of the four settings completed the training at the time of final data collection. This evaluation queries:

1. What is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the educators' interactions?
2. What is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the setting?

The methods used to answer the two research questions above involved:

- Direct observations of the four settings and analysis using the Programme Quality Assessment and a Literacy and Numeracy Indicator Scheme
- Analysis of 36 films of the 18 educators' interactions using the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale. The films were taken by the SLT at the beginning and at the end of the Language Enrichment Programme in the three settings who had completed the Programme
- Interviews with 19 participating educators and managers of the settings
- Analysis of those interviews and six written testimonies of changes to practice

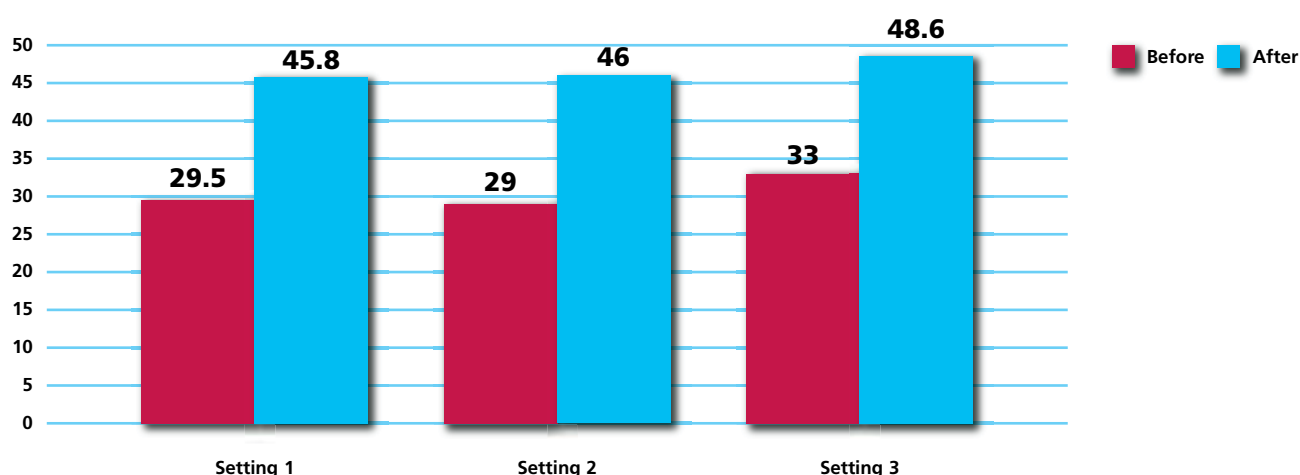
Baseline data was collected in May 2012. Follow up data was collected in June 2013, after the Language Enrichment Programme was delivered to staff, parents and children by a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT). It should be noted that parents were not included in this evaluation. However, the internal evaluation sheets completed by the parents and documented by the co-ordinator of the project are detailed in full in the Appendices.

The study conforms to the research protocols of the overall evaluation of the NEYAI. Participants' rights were respected; the settings', staff's and children's confidentiality was assured. The data was anonymised and stored securely. The evaluator's presence inevitably impacted on the interactions, this was offset by using videos taken by the speech and language therapist. This is a small-scale study therefore the findings are not generalisable but specific to the settings involved; however although each educator and setting was unique they were all singular examples of early childhood settings in the statutory and community sector.

## Findings and discussion on the impact of the Programme on educators' Interactions

The findings revealed that the Programme had a significant and positive impact on the quality of the educators' interactions as obtained through use of the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale. The following graph provides the breakdown of the overall improvement in the educators' interactions in the three settings which completed the Programme at that time.

### Impact Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale Results for each Setting



It is clear that across all settings a similar level of improvement was made. This finding was corroborated by the interviews and written testimonies. It was revealed that story time has changed in a number of ways, such as the importance of positioning children; not correcting children's language or perspective; relinquishing conversational control in story reading; creating an appropriate environment for dialogic reading; extending vocabulary; and spending more time reading a story. Providing space, time and opportunity for children to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and language, succinctly described as "let them talk" by one participant, was frequently referenced by the respondents as a significant impact of the Programme on their interactions. This in turn was highly influenced by the process of 'observe, wait and listen'.

The positive changes to story reading and the potential that stories have to engage children in extended purposive conversation were manifested in the evaluation. A pedagogy of conversation is emerging in the settings. With practice and opportunities to reflect further on their interactions, the educators may be in a position to nurture those conversations throughout the day. This is particularly important in the context of educational inequality, in particular exposure to decontextualised language. Educators need to be able to extend and expand on what children are saying.

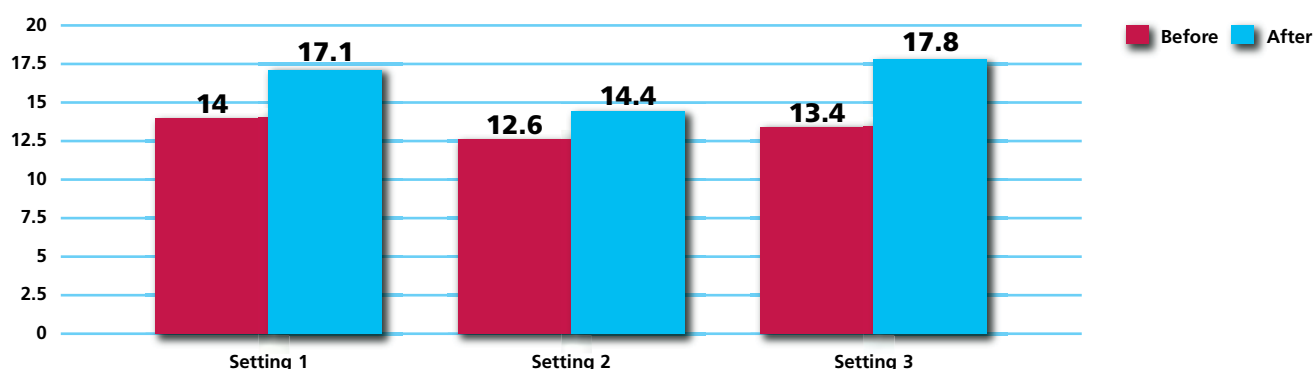
It is hypothesised that the success of the Programme was due to the engagement of the managers as well as the dispositions and readiness of staff, the quality of the in-service training and onsite mentoring support. The SLT was particularly skilled; and managed to combine a strengths-based focus with expertise to model the required strategies onsite; to suggest new approaches and encourage practice of those approaches and to pick up on the language issues of the children. The use of videos and the process of self-evaluation and video-feedback with staff also appeared to be particularly useful.

The model of delivery was successful based on the five indicators of successful in service training: a focus on content knowledge; opportunities throughout the training for active learning which in turn was dependent on the form of the in-service education (workshop, onsite mentoring); coherence with other learning activities; collective participation of educators from the same setting and the duration of the programme.

## Findings and discussion on the impact of the Programme on the setting

The findings reveal that for those settings whose staff, including the managers, engaged in the Programme a significant and positive impact was had on the overall quality of the settings as derived through use of the Program Quality Assessment (PQA). In particular: the learning environment (which includes attention to literacy and numeracy), the daily routine and adult child interactions. The following graph provides the breakdown of those overall results setting by setting.

Impact Program Quality Assessment Results for each Setting



These are reassuring results. For the settings participating in the Programme the PQA scores on adult-child interaction demonstrated improvements in:

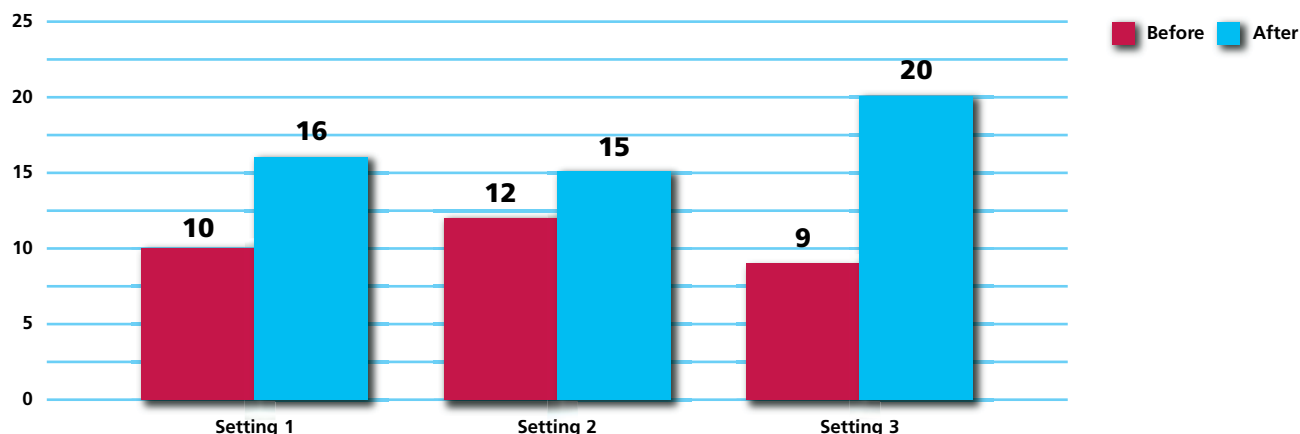
- support for child communication
- encouragement of child initiatives
- support for child learning at group times
- opportunities for child exploration
- encouragement for peer interaction
- independent problem solving



This is completely consistent with the principles underpinning the Programme. This picture is corroborated by the educators as ascertained through interview and in written submissions of examples of changes to educators' practice.

In relation to the Literacy and Numeracy Indicator positive findings were recorded on the dimensions of environmental print, book and literacy areas, reading stories, emergent writing, counting, shape and space and simple numbers. The following graph provides the breakdown of the overall results setting by setting.

### Impact Literacy and Numeracy Indicator Results for each Setting



These results clearly suggest an improvement in relation to most items with the exception of 'sounds in words' which was not observed at the time of data gathering. 'Sounds in words' refers to clapping games, jumping with young children, attention to linking sounds to letters and 'sorting, matching' where children know why a set of shapes is alike; the language of sorting, comparing or matching is used in a variety of contexts and experiences.

The quality of the environment has improved as revealed through the interviews (and observation); activities and objects are labelled, story books are provided relating to children's emergent interests and for reference in interest areas. Cosy new reading areas have been developed in addition to opportunities for literacy, numeracy and writing. There is a strong connection made between language, literacy and the importance of writing.

The Programme had an impact on educators' awareness of speech and language issues. Educators appreciate and understand children's differing abilities with regard to language and communication. They are focussing more on quieter children. As reported in the interviews the educators now have confidence to follow children's lead in learning experiences and conversation. Critically educators now have confidence to identify speech, language and communication issues and to know what to do. This means that early identification systems and strategies could be in place. Confident and competent children are at the heart of Aistear, but they in turn need confident and competent adults.

The potential conflict between HighScope and the Language Enrichment Programme which can be succinctly put as encouragement versus praise and adult-direction versus adult-initiation was addressed and strategies to ensure coherence between the two can be easily adopted. In the first instance, in the evaluator's perspective, the same approach words can be used while dropping the value judgement of 'good', whether it is for an individual or group. Equally for children who are challenged by sitting and listening, small group time can be a natural vehicle for learning, providing there are small numbers of children, skilled educators and games are interactive, fun and interesting as advocated in the Listening Groups. In conclusion the Language Enrichment Programme had a positive impact on the quality of the educators' interactions and on the quality of the settings.







## Chapter 1

# Background and overview of the Language Enrichment Programme

# 1. Background and overview of the Language Enrichment Programme

This document reports on the Evaluation of the Language Enrichment Programme of the Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Initiative of which the Ballyfermot/ Chapelizod Partnership is the lead agency. This Introduction begins by providing the background to the project, namely the National Early Years Access Initiative. An overview of language development in Irish policy, the Language Enrichment Programme, the Hanen Teacher Talk training and HighScope is presented. The contents of this report are outlined.

## 1.1 Background – The National Early Years Access Initiative

The Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Initiative is one of 11 National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) projects throughout Ireland which provide supports for children from birth to six years. NEYAI is funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, Mount Street Club Trustees, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Early Years Policy Unit and the Department of Education and Skills through Pobal. It is a three year initiative from April 2011 to April 2014. The general aims of NEYAI are:

- Improvement in the quality and coordination of local services to young children and families in a small number of demonstration sites; and
- Provision of an evidence-base to inform mainstream practice and policy with regard to the design and delivery of integrated services for young children and families and to leave in place a sustainable legacy for the future.

The NEYAI is predicated on interagency collaboration. All projects are underpinned by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework<sup>4</sup> and Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.<sup>5</sup> While all 11 NEYAI projects in Ireland are providing supports to children from birth to six years not all projects are providing the same intervention. Interventions include a focus on parenting, early numeracy, quality, up skilling early years settings and language enrichment.

### 1.1.1 Language development in Irish policy

In addition to the Ballyfermot NEYAI project with its focus on language development it is acknowledged in Irish policy documents that:

*‘Early experiences that support the development of children’s communication skills (such as their awareness of verbal and non-verbal communication; their knowledge of sound, pattern, rhythm and repetition; their awareness of symbols such as print and pictures; the opportunities that they have to become familiar with and enjoy print in a meaningful way; and the opportunities that they have to use mark-making materials) play a key role in the development of their literacy skills’.*<sup>6</sup>

Ireland’s Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, Aistear<sup>7</sup> and the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, Síolta<sup>8</sup> both highlight the importance of early communication. Aistear focuses on planning for the provision of enriching, challenging and enjoyable learning experiences for children. Within the themes, aims and learning goals there are specific references to early language and literacy. One of Aistear’s four themes relates to ‘Communicating’. Guidelines on interactions are provided in addition to videos and tip-sheets.<sup>9</sup>

Síolta sets the broad context for ensuring quality in early childhood education and care settings within which early learning is best supported. This includes standards in relation to organisational considerations, professional practice and communication as well as those focused on play, establishing a learning environment and ensuring a relevant broad based curriculum is in place. Importantly, one of Síolta’s Standards relates to ‘Interactions’.

<sup>4</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2009). *Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education. (2006). *Síolta: The national quality framework for early childhood education*. Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020*. Dublin: DES, p.10.

<sup>7</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. (2009). *Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

<sup>8</sup> Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education. (2006). *Síolta: The national quality framework for early childhood education*. Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

<sup>9</sup> See [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment/Early\\_Childhood\\_and\\_Primary\\_Education/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education/Aistear\\_Toolkit/](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Early_Childhood_Education/Aistear_Toolkit/)



### 1.1.2 Early Years Language and Learning Initiative

The consortium members in the Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Initiative include seven Primary schools, all the Early Years settings, The Base, Ballyfermot Star and the lead agency Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership. This project caters for over 1200 children and 179 early years educators.

There are two main strands to the Early Years Language and Learning Initiative. One strand is six weeks of Aistear workshops delivered to all early years' educators in Ballyfermot working with children up to six years of age including infant teachers in primary schools. The workshops aim to be fun and interactive and explore how to bring Aistear into the infant classroom or childcare setting, how to build the curriculum using Aistear and to explore how children learn through play. The workshops are delivered to early year's educators and primary teachers in groups together with the aim of building up relationships between these groups thereby improving the transitions for children from early childhood settings to school.<sup>10</sup>

The second strand of the Ballyfermot Language and Learning Initiative is the Language Enrichment Programme. The Language Enrichment Programme is the focus of this evaluation report.

## 1.2 Overview of the Language Enrichment Programme

The objectives of the Language Enrichment Programme were agreed through collaboration with the Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Consortium and the Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) appointed to undertake the programme in late 2011.

### 1.2.1 Aim

The overall Language Enrichment Programme aimed to create an environment rich in language.

### 1.2.2 Objectives

The specific objectives were:

1. The transference of skills in facilitating young children's speech, language and communication development to early years educators through training in three Teacher Talk sessions (based on the Hanen Programme<sup>11</sup>, see 1.3 below for more detail) and follow up video sessions.
2. The development of young children's speech, language and communication facilitated through 'parent and child' educational training workshops and 'listening groups'.
3. To provide accessible and convenient training to all participants by delivery in local sites and conducting video sessions in the individual educators settings.
4. Evaluation of the programme to be conducted internally and externally.

Each training session was evaluated by the participants collected by the SLT. Evaluations were also conducted by the programme co-ordinator. Independent evaluation of the first four settings to complete the training was conducted by an independent early childhood education specialist in tandem with the national evaluation of all the NEYAI projects.

### 1.2.3 Components

The Language Enrichment Programme contained three main strands:

**Strand 1** - Three Teacher Talk training sessions (based on the Hanen Programme) and follow up video sessions over one year with early childhood educators.

**Strand 2** - 'Parent and Child' educational sessions called "Chatter Matters" which focussed on the development of early communication followed by shared activity with the children. This group was conducted for approximately one hour per week over eight weeks.

**Strand 3** - A 'Listening Group' which was created for a small group of children with the early childhood educators. This group was delivered immediately after the Parent and Child group and varied from 30 to 40 minutes per week (depending on the numbers of children) over the same eight weeks.

<sup>10</sup> For further information see Walsh, G., McMillan, D., Doherty, A & Fitzgerald, C. (2013). *Evaluating the Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Initiative to promote Quality Improvement in Early Years Settings through the Use of the Aistear*. Dublin: Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership.

<sup>11</sup> Weitzman, E. & Greenberg J. (2002). *Learning language and loving it* (2nd ed.). Toronto, Canada: Hanen Programme.

The Parent and Child and listening groups were taken up by 10 settings in the Ballyfermot/ Cherry Orchard area. This evaluation focuses on just four of the 10 settings.

#### 1.2.4 Strand 1 - Delivery of Teacher Talk training for early years educators

The three training days were delivered on Saturdays to four settings initially. These settings are the focus of this evaluation. Twenty participants commenced the training. Eighteen had completed the training prior to the final data gathering for the evaluation.

##### Overview of the three Teacher Talk training days

The three training days' were entitled:

1. Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood Settings – Training A
2. Let Language Lead the Way to Literacy – Training B
3. Fostering Peer Interaction in Early Childhood Settings – Training C

The first day concerned different types of communication styles and the strategies of observe, wait and listen (OWL), the second day involved linking language and literacy through story reading, and the third day focussed on peer interaction. Following each of the three days training, the SLT videoed each participating educator while working with children in their own work setting. The SLT and the educator engaged in individual video-stimulated reflective dialogues in order to reinforce the learning of each of the training sessions. Educators were invited to assess their own practice (see *Appendix 1 Self-rating scale for interactions* for detail). Each participating educator experienced three one hour sessions of filming and intensive individual video feedback following each day of training.

#### 1.2.5 Strand 2 - Delivery of 'Chatter Matters'

The SLT facilitated the 'Chatter Matters' language programme to groups of parents and children. Groups of parents and children came together in Cherry Orchard ChildCare, St. Ultan's Early Start, St Vincent's' Early Childhood Development Service, The Base, St. Michael's Pre-school, Realt Beag at Ballyfermot Star, St Raphael's pre-school, Dominican campus, St. Louise's and Mary Queen of Angels primary schools. For the first half hour of the session, parents were to be given tips and ideas by the SLT on how to enrich communication with their child. Parents were to discuss ideas and seek advice. The parents were then to be joined by their children for a DVD of 'Ra Ra Lion' and some games, songs and interaction.

##### Overview of eight week parent and child sessions:

The Chatter Matters parent and children educational training days was developed by the Speech and Language Therapist. These sessions draw from Ready Steady Talk<sup>12</sup> which suggests games and activities for parents to engage in with their two to three year old children. Each game focusses on one of five core skills: paying attention and listening, understanding what is said, learning new words, making longer sentences and talking socially. The Communication Cookbook<sup>13</sup> is aimed at the three years plus children and builds on the same core skills as Ready, Steady, Talk. A key message is the appropriateness of the games for children and positive child-led adult child interactions. For more detail on the content of the individual sessions please see *Appendix 2 Components of Chatter Matters and Listening Groups*.

#### 1.2.6 Strand 3 - Delivery of 'Listening Groups'

Immediately after the 'Chatter Matters' sessions, a sub-group of children participated in a 'Listening Group' with the Speech and Language Therapist. For the younger children the focus of the groups is to make sure that the children learn to take turns and wait – these terms are important as behaviour is described that is desired to be repeated. The older children are actively taught the skill of listening. These children may not have yet acquired this skill, for whatever reason, which is essential to survive in a junior infants' classroom. Without the skill of listening the children targeted in the older groups will spend their time getting negative attention from an adult and be expected to listen without being taught the behaviours required to do that skill. One or two staff from the settings participated also in the language and listening groups so the skills will be passed on. It is hoped the groups will become sustainable with early years staff delivering

<sup>12</sup> I Can. (2010). *Ready, steady, talk*. London: I can. [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk).

<sup>13</sup> I Can. (2008). *Communication Cookbook*. London: I can. [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

language groups themselves with parents and children in the future. See *Appendix 2 Components of Chatter Matters and Listening Groups* for detail on the themes incorporated each week.

This evaluation focuses mainly on the Teacher Talk™ training of the Language Enrichment Programme as 18 respondents from three of the four settings in the evaluation completed this training. A much fewer number (approximately eight) were engaged in the Chatter Matters programme and the Listening Groups. However, the evaluation also touches on the Listening Groups and the responses from parents in relation to the Chatter Matters and the Listening Groups are recorded in full in *Appendix 3 Internal Evaluations of the Language Enrichment Programme*. Two of the four settings in this evaluation use the HighScope approach to early learning. There appeared to be some conflict which emerged in the evaluation in relation to the Teacher Talk™ training and HighScope, therefore attention is now turned to explaining both.

### 1.3 Overview of Teacher Talk™ Training

#### 1.3.1 Theoretical background

Teacher Talk is designed to introduce early childhood educators to the Learning Language and Loving It – The Hanen Programme for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers. Teacher Talk is based on social interactionist perspectives of development. This perspective views children's acquisition of language, social skills, and emergent literacy within the context of child/adult interactions in early childhood.<sup>14</sup> The Teacher Talk training focusses on the kinds of interaction strategies that best facilitate language, literacy and social development in young children and that helps educators create rich and stimulating learning environments for the children they work with.<sup>15</sup> The strategies employed are based on five premises:

1. Educators "can positively influence children's acquisition of language and literacy through frequent, high quality interactions in which educators practice linguistic responsiveness."
2. "Responsive language input is essential to children's language development." Responsive language input that builds on the child's focus or topic is more easily processed by the child and therefore the child redirects more cognitive resources to learn language.
3. "Children benefit from being involved in extended interactions in which they are full and active participants" where they can refine and practice their communication skills, learn the rules of conversation with educators who will model progressively complex language relevant to the child's topic.
4. Children's exposure to a wide and variable vocabulary predicts subsequent vocabulary growth.
5. "Exposure to decontextualised language in the context of everyday interactions is essential to children's language and literacy outcomes." Children need engagement in extended discourse where they are obliged to use language in abstract and complex ways in contexts that are removed from the here and now, such as in dialogic reading (shared story book reading, where children talk about the story).<sup>16</sup>

This programme supports educators in how to facilitate the language and emergent literacy development of young children during every day routines and activities, and in how to become more sensitive to the individual needs and abilities of children, responding in ways that will be most helpful to each child.<sup>17</sup>

#### 1.3.2 Programme contents

Educators learn to apply the following three clusters of responsive interaction strategies:<sup>18, 19</sup>

1. Child-oriented strategies encourage children to initiate and engage in conversational interactions so that educators can then provide responsive language input on the child's topic of interest – strategies include Observe, Wait and Listen; Be Face to Face; Follow the Child's Lead (Imitate, Interpret, Comment); Join In and Play.

<sup>14</sup> Bohannon, J. & Bonvillian, J. (1997). Theoretical approaches to language acquisition. In J. Berko Gleason (Ed.), *The development of language* (4th ed., pp. 259-316). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Cited in The Hanen Centre (Undated). *Research summary: Learning Language and Loving It-The Hanen Program for early childhood educators/teachers*. Toronto: The Hanen Centre. Available at [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hanen.org/Professional-Development/Workshops-for-Educators/Teacher-Talk-Training-Series.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> The Hanen Centre (Undated). *Research summary: Learning Language and Loving It-The Hanen Program for early childhood educators/teachers*. Toronto: The Hanen Centre, p.2. Available at [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)

<sup>17</sup> [www.hanen.org/Professional-Development/Workshops-For-SLPs/Learning-Language-Loving-It.aspx](http://www.hanen.org/Professional-Development/Workshops-For-SLPs/Learning-Language-Loving-It.aspx). Retrieved 9.11.2013

<sup>18</sup> The Hanen Centre (Undated). *Research summary: Learning Language and Loving It-The Hanen Program for early childhood educators/teachers*. Toronto: The Hanen Centre. Available at [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)

<sup>19</sup> Girolametto, L. & Weitzman, E. (2002). Responsiveness of child care providers in interactions with toddlers and preschoolers. *Language, speech, and hearing services in schools*, (33) 268-281 October

2. Interaction-promoting strategies encourage extended, balanced conversations between educators and children in both one-to-one and small group interactions. This involves listening carefully to the children, tailoring responses to their interests and not dominating the conversation – strategies include Cue the Child to Take a Turn; Use a Variety of Questions to Encourage Conversation; Balance Comments and Questions; Scan Small Groups (carefully observe each child to facilitate her/his participation and interaction).
3. Language-modelling strategies build children’s receptive and expressive language skills, as well as their emergent literacy knowledge by providing models of more advanced oral language and emergent literacy knowledge – strategies include Use a Variety of Labels (use nouns, verbs, adjectives and include unfamiliar words); Expand on What the Child Says; Extend the Topic (by modelling decontextualized language).

Educators learn how to:

- Promote every child’s language development using natural everyday activities, routines and play
- Become attuned to individual children’s communication styles in order to engage every child in frequent, positive interactions
- Become responsive to individual children and follow their lead
- Adjust the way they talk to help children learn language and, in time, develop decontextualized language
- Promote positive peer interaction, especially for socially isolated children
- Facilitate language-learning in pretend play, including increasing children’s ability to engage in pretend play
- Foster emergent literacy skills by making print “talk” in the classroom

As mentioned above two of the four settings in this evaluation use the HighScope approach to early learning. As a result an overview of HighScope is now offered. This is included because it is important to ensure that programmes operated by early childhood educators are underpinned by the same principles and are mutually supportive and coherent with each other (see 2.4 *Process of delivery* for further detail).

## 1.4 Overview of HighScope

The HighScope model of education was designed by David Weikart and colleagues in the US beginning in 1962 ‘...in response to the persistent failures of high school students from Ypsilanti’s poorest neighbourhoods’.<sup>20</sup> The name ‘HighScope’ refers to the high purposes and far-reaching mission of a model of education originating in the USA. Its goal is to improve the life chances of children and young people by promoting high-quality educational programmes.<sup>21</sup> The model supports children from birth and emphasises authentic educator-child relationships, the provision of opportunities for active participatory learning and attention to the learning environment.

HighScope advocates that the daily routine provides a common framework of support for children of diverse abilities as they pursue their interests and engage in various learning experiences. The daily routine consists of specific time segments allotted to certain activities and is designed to support children’s initiatives and to be flexible. The routine enables children to anticipate what happens next and gives them control over what they do in each part of the day. For pre-schoolers it includes the plan—do—review process unique to HighScope, which enables children to express their intentions, carry them out and reflect on what they’ve done. Small-group time provides educator-initiated learning experiences based on observations of children’s interests, key developmental indicators and local events. In large-group time, educators and children initiate music and movement activities, storytelling and so on. Other aspects of the routine include greeting time, tidy-up time, outside time, break and transition times.

<sup>20</sup> Hohman, M. & Weikart, D. (1995). *Educating Young Children*. USA: The High/Scope Press, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> French, G. (2012). The HighScope approach to early learning. In Máire Mhic Mhathúna and Mark Taylor (Eds), *Early Childhood Education and Care. An Introduction for Students in Ireland* (pp. 127-134). Dublin: Gill and MacMillan.



The learning environment in a HighScope setting, indoors and outdoors, is carefully planned to provide children with the optimum opportunities to work independently, to make choices and decisions and to solve problems. Children are actively encouraged to use the materials in creative ways. For example, it is just as valid to stack pieces of a jigsaw as it is to make the jigsaw. The indoor and outdoor space is organised into specific areas of interest to support children's involvement with activities such as building, pretending and role play, 'reading' and 'writing', playing with sand and water, drawing and painting, counting, sorting, climbing, singing and dancing. The areas are stocked with a wide variety of easily accessible, open-ended natural, found, real-life and commercial materials, which reflect children's home cultures and interests and can be used in creative and purposeful ways, providing ample opportunities for problems to be solved. These materials are labelled and stored so that children can find, use and return materials they need. Children are encouraged to combine materials from different areas.

Other core elements of this model include ongoing observation and assessment of children's learning and sharing educational experiences with their families. HighScope requires the establishment of educator-child interactions focussing on sharing conversational control with children, participating in children's play and a problem-solving approach to learning. HighScope is continually being updated to reflect research on child development, the experience of practicing educators, the development of new theories and curriculum content standards.<sup>22</sup> One of the key tenets of the HighScope approach (and Montessori) is a focus on encouraging children to self-evaluate rather than praising them. This theme is explored further in 2.2.4 *Interaction strategies*. The next section provides an overview of this document.

### 1.5 Overview of this document

The document is presented in six chapters. The introduction provides the background to the project and programme details. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of relevance to early speech, language and communication development. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this evaluation of the Language Enrichment Programme. In Chapter 4 the findings are presented and discussed in relation to the impact of the Programme on the educators' interactions. Chapter 5 focusses on presenting and discussing the findings in relation to the impact of the Programme on the overall quality of the setting. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion and recommendations for this evaluation.

<sup>22</sup> Epstein, A. (2007). *Essentials of active learning in preschool*. Ypsilanti, Michigan: High/Scope Press.







## Chapter 2

### Literature review

## 2 Literature review

The literature review is presented in four sections. It begins with why a focus on speech, language and communication is important, particularly in the context of educational inequality. Lessons from research on interactions are outlined with a focus on extended purposive conversations and the interaction strategies associated with those conversations. The characteristics of quality in early childhood settings are then presented. The processes involved in the delivery of successful early intervention projects are explored with a particular focus on effective in-service education. The chapter ends with a summary.

### 2.1 Why a Focus on speech, language and communication is Important

There are five main reasons why a focus on speech, language and communication is important<sup>23</sup>:

1. It is a fundamental right of children to enjoy 'freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds'.<sup>24</sup> To enable children to enjoy this right, they need to be supported to communicate, that is, to initiate interactions with others in order to convey their feelings, needs and wants and to know they have been heard.
2. We know that the development of speech, language and communication skills are central to learning and development. Communication is the 21st century life skill. Without these skills learning is compromised and functioning in everyday society is severely challenged.<sup>25</sup>
3. Research has demonstrated that in the UK:
  - Two to three children in every classroom have some form of long-term and persistent speech, language and communication difficulty. This can affect them early, severely and for life.
  - In areas where people live with social, economic and educational inequality, 50% of children are starting school with delayed communication skills. Their speech may be unclear, vocabulary is smaller, sentences are shorter and they are able to understand only simple instructions. Many of these children can catch up with the *right support*.
  - 50-90% of children with persistent speech, language and communication difficulties go on to have reading difficulties.
  - At least 60% of young people in young offender institutions have communication difficulties, in comparison to 10% of the overall population.<sup>26</sup>

Children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are at high risk of difficulties with reading, writing and spelling. If children can't say words, they will be more likely to have difficulties in 'sounding out' words for reading and spelling, or writing them down. If they can't understand the words they hear, they will struggle to understand what they have read.

- 4 The acquisition of a first language is the most complex skill anyone ever learns; and this task needs to be virtually complete by the time a child reaches school age.<sup>27</sup> Neuroscience (although in its infancy) has revealed that the synapses in a child's brain multiply 20-fold between birth and three years of age, a rate that is faster than at any other time in life.<sup>28</sup> Figure 1 provides an overview of that development.

<sup>23</sup> French, G. (2013). *Early speech and language matters: Enriching the communication environment and language development in early childhood*. Dublin: Barnardos Training and Resource Service, pp.18-20.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva: United Nations.

<sup>25</sup> The Communication Trust. (November 2011). *Written evidence submitted by the Communication Trust to the House of Commons Education Committee*. Retrieved August 4 2012 from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/>

<sup>26</sup> The Communication Trust, [www.communicationtrust.org](http://www.communicationtrust.org)

<sup>27</sup> Crystal, D. (1987). *Cambridge encyclopaedia of language*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Gerhardt, S. (2005). *Why love matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain*. London: Routledge.



## Human Brain Development

### Synapse formation dependent on early experiences

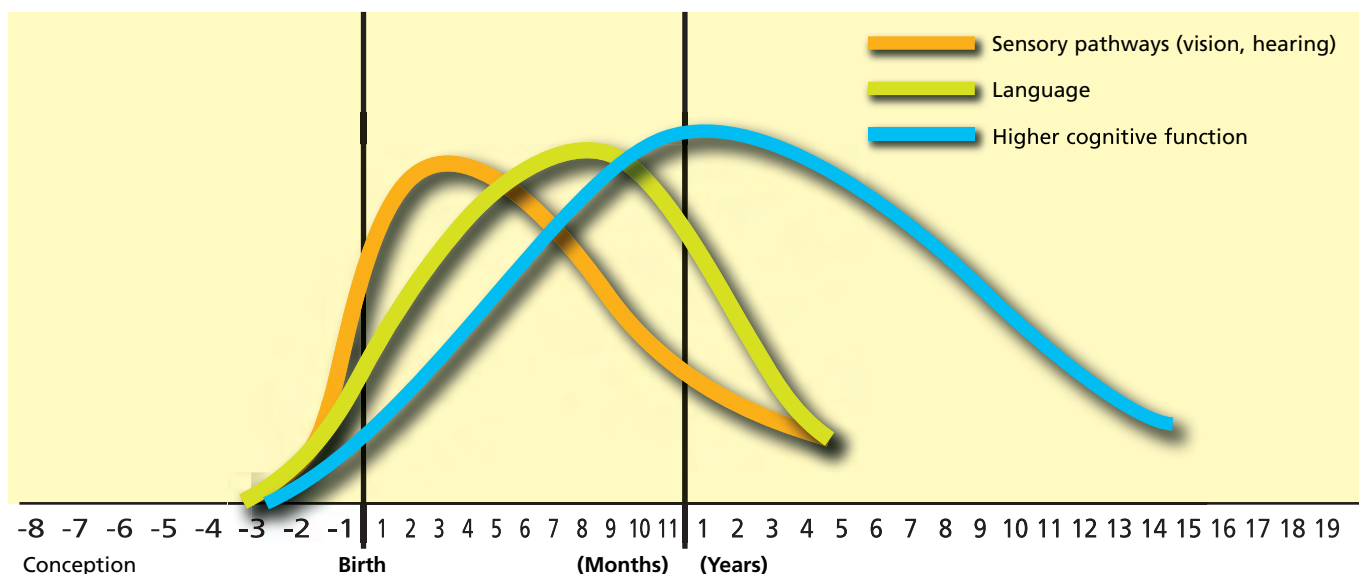


Figure 1 Human brain development<sup>29</sup>

The most significant growth in the connections in the brain that are related to language development reaches its peak before 12 months and this growth depends in part on the kind of experiences the **very young** child has both inside and outside their home. From birth, the more experience children have of being read and talked to, the greater their capacity for language and literacy.<sup>30</sup>

5. For some children who are at risk of educational inequality, the long-term consequences of poor early language development may include: truancy, early school leaving, unemployment or employment in low-skilled jobs, poor emotional and physical health, social consequences such as alcohol or drug abuse, increased likelihood of income poverty and imprisonment; ultimately reduced educational attainment and life chances (see 2.1.1 below for further discussion).<sup>31, 32</sup>

In a background paper to Aistear, it was identified that through language, children appropriate (internalise) their culture, seek the cooperation of others in their activities, integrate new experiences into an existing knowledge base and reflect on their actions.<sup>33</sup> Children's development of both receptive (hearing and understanding) and expressive (speaking) language is therefore important. Receptive and expressive language refers to:

- Hearing (which involves listening), understanding and making sense of what people say
- Using words to build up sentences
- Using sentences to build up conversations, extend spoken language (and thought) and engage in the social use of language

All three combine to make children the skilful communicators they are. The reasons above indicate why a project such as the Language Enrichment Programme has significant potential to enhance children's life chances, particularly as this Programme is situated in areas where children are at risk of educational inequality.

<sup>29</sup> Shonkoff, J.P. & Phillips, D.A.(Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, D. C.: National Academy of Sciences.

<sup>30</sup> National Literacy Trust. (2004). *Early language advocacy kit for early years professionals*. London: National Literacy Trust. Retrieved July 27 2012 from [www.nationalliteracytrust.org](http://www.nationalliteracytrust.org)

<sup>31</sup> KPMG Foundation. (2006). *The long term costs of literacy difficulties*. UK: KPMG Foundation.

<sup>32</sup> National Economic and Social Forum. (2009). *Child literacy and social inclusion: Implementation issues*. Report No. 39. Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

<sup>33</sup> French, G. (2007). *Children's early learning and development, Background paper to Aistear*. Commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie))

### 2.1.1 Language in the context of educational inequality

There is a substantial body of literature and research relating to the importance for young children who may be at risk of educational inequality of possessing well-developed spoken language skills. <sup>34, 35, 36, 37</sup> Language provides the most generally effective means of communication between adults and children. The development of language fulfils important functions other than communication. The evidence from seminal studies suggests that there is a reciprocal correspondence between communication/language (speech) and thought.<sup>38</sup>

Vygotsky<sup>39</sup> views learning as a deeply social process and as such places significance on dialogue. His experiments demonstrated two important points. In solving problems, children's action and their speech are part of the one complex psychological function. Secondly, the more complex the problem to be solved and the less direct the solution, the greater the role that speech plays. Vygotsky<sup>40</sup> suggested that through cultural tools such as language (in addition to numbering, writing and drawings) children master their own mental processes just as technical tools help to master the work process. Higher mental functions (such as perception and thinking) are mediated via children's use of the cultural tools. These cultural tools are incorporated in storytelling, literature, art, play and dialogue (conversation). Vygotsky placed language and communication at the heart of personal and intellectual development: "thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them".<sup>41</sup> In this dynamic interplay as children learn to use words, so also they learn concepts. It is logical then that the ability of children to engage with the school curriculum is in part related to their ability to use language.

Dockrell and Lindsay<sup>42</sup> highlight the challenges that young children have as a consequence of having language difficulties. These challenges are compounded for those children for whom English is a second language. Children may experience problems in general communication and social skills, in accessing the curriculum particularly on language-related tasks, in approaches to learning and attention span. There is also evidence that written language development draws on oral competence.<sup>43</sup> Oral language is the foundation for literacy development. Reading ability is dependent on grammatical and semantic language competence. Riley et al.<sup>44</sup> report "that children with poor skills of language processing are weak at the literal and inferential comprehension of texts".

The research addressed above points to the critical importance of early childhood education and care. Early childhood settings have a significant role in providing the kinds of language, literacy and social experiences that will support children to engage with and make the kinds of meanings that are expected at school. These language, literacy and social experiences are mainly mediated through interactions, which is the focus of the next section.

## 2.2 Lessons from research on interactions

The fewer experiences children have with literacy and language (i.e. vocabulary and talk), the greater the chance that they will have difficulty learning to read. Hart and Risley<sup>45</sup> established a high correlation between vocabulary size at age three and language test scores at ages nine and ten in areas of vocabulary, listening, syntax (sentence structure, grammar, language rules), and reading comprehension.

Importantly parental interaction strategies associated with higher vocabulary in children were identified. These included warmth and few restrictions, asking rather than directing children, listening and responsiveness, and a wide use of vocabulary with high information content. For some children, there is an encouragement to engage in conversation, ask questions, negotiate rules, make judgments, express opinions, reflect, problem solve and so on. While, for other children, adult language is mainly aimed at directing and controlling behaviour ('floor holding'), with far fewer opportunities to develop more complex language.

Subsequent studies have found that it is what parents and educators do with their children that make a real difference to the children's learning and development.<sup>46</sup> In addition what parents do is more important than who they are (that is their socio-economic status or educational level).<sup>47, 48</sup> Parents may undertake a range of experiences with young children which have a positive effect on their development. For example, reading with the child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library, taking children on visits and creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home, are all associated with higher intellectual and social/behavioural scores. This research indicates that:



- 34 Edwards, J. R. (1989). *Language and disadvantage: Studies in disorders of communication*. (2nd ed.) London: Whurr.
- 35 Tizard, B. & Hughes, M. (2002). *Young children learning*. (2nd ed.). UK: Blackwell Publishing.
- 36 Tough, J. (1977). *The development of meaning*. London: Unwin Education Books.
- 37 Wells, G. (1986). *The meaning makers: Children learning language and using language to learn*. UK: Hodder & Stoughton.
- 38 Vygotsky, L. S. (1985). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press.
- 39 Op cite
- 40 Op cite
- 41 Op Cite, p. 125
- 42 Dockrell, J. E. & Lindsey, G. (2001). Children with specific speech and language difficulties - the teachers' perspectives, *Oxford Review of Education*, 27, 369-394.
- 43 Riley, J., Burrell, A. & McCallum, B. (2004). Developing the spoken language skills of reception class children in two multicultural, inner-city primary schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5) October, 657-672.
- 44 Op cite, p. 659
- 45 Hart, B., & Risley, T.R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Baltimore, Maryland: Brookes
- 46 Roulstone, S., Law, J., Rush, R., Clegg, J. & Peters, T. (2010). The role of language in children's early educational outcomes. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- 47 Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S, Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Research Report No. 356. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- 48 Weisleder, A. & Fernald, A. (2013). Talking to children matters: Early language experience strengthens processing and builds vocabulary. *Psychological Science*, XX(X) 1-10



- Aspects of children's communication environment which can positively enhance children's language, communication and hence literacy skills are identified.
- Children's exposure to a broad vocabulary range through educator-child interactions in early childhood settings is particularly significant.
- An appropriate communication environment can offset educational inequality to a significant extent.

### 2.2.1 What should we strive for in early childhood settings?

A key finding of the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project was that the most effective early childhood settings, in terms of social, intellectual and dispositional outcomes for children, were characterised by adults and children engaging in episodes of 'sustained shared thinking'.<sup>49</sup> The research revealed that such episodes, although infrequently observed, were "a necessary pre-requisite for the most effective early years settings".<sup>50</sup>

Sustained shared thinking in the context of the REPEY project was defined as an "episode in which two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative, etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend".<sup>51</sup> Shared thinking is not a new concept; it has long been identified as significant to cognitive development in young children.<sup>52, 53, 54</sup> It is proposed that the concept of 'shared thinking' may involve more than 'individuals working together' in an intellectual way and that as a concept it could be extended. It is a creation of joint understandings between partners, built on common ground, but acknowledging that each person works from a unique perspective. Some adjustments are necessary to truly understand the other. It is those adjustments that are the basis for development.

Furthermore, it is proposed that educators must be proactive in engaging children in shared thinking and must establish and maintain children's attention.<sup>55</sup> One study has proposed using the term 'extended purposive conversations' to enable educators to conceptualise 'sustained shared thinking' and to inform their practice.<sup>56</sup> Extended purposive conversations with children (who may be either experts or novices) are what educators (who equally may be either experts or novices depending on the topic at hand – see 2.2.3 in relation to co-construction for further explanation) should strive for in early childhood settings. As outlined in 1.3 these types of conversations are central to the Hanen Programme.

### 2.2.2 Extended Purposive Conversations

It could be argued that to coin a new term is unnecessary, particularly as it is considered that both the terms 'sustained shared thinking' and 'extended purposive conversations' are underpinned by the same concepts of intersubjectivity, joint involvement and co-construction. However, it is proposed that the difference is the focus on conversation. The main purpose is to extend the conversation by listening to and engaging children with conscious purpose and intent, encouraging them to articulate their discoveries and their learning as they go about their daily experiences in play. The intention is to interact with children in order to enhance their development and learning.

'Extended purposive conversations' is a useful term to help communicate to educators and students, who are working with three and four year old children, that purposefully aiming towards lengthening the amount of engagement in talk is important and requires thoughtfulness and planning. Alexander<sup>57</sup> refers to an emerging pedagogy of the spoken word; the term 'extended purposive conversations' suggests that a pedagogy of conversation could emerge. Such pedagogy utilises the power of conversation to engage children's learning and thinking and secure their understanding. It is suggested that the term could support the application of the theory in practice.

<sup>49</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Research Report No. 356. London: Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>50</sup> Op cite, p. 11

<sup>51</sup> Op cite, p. 8

<sup>52</sup> Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>53</sup> Goncu, A. & Rogoff, B. (1998). Children's categorization with varying adult support. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(2), pp. 333-349.

<sup>54</sup> Wells, G. (1985). *Language, learning and education*. Berkshire: NFER-Nelson.

<sup>55</sup> Tayler, C. (2001). Australian early childhood milieu: Teacher challenges in promoting children's language and thinking. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 9(1), 41-58.

<sup>56</sup> French, G. (2011). *Towards extended purposive conversations: An exploration of interactions between three educators and young children in early childhood education and care settings in urban areas designated as disadvantaged*. In partial fulfilment for a Doctorate in Education (EdD), at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander, R. (2008). *Essays on pedagogy*. Oxon: Routledge. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(2), 333-349.



The emphasis on 'conversation' is perhaps more concrete, grounded in practice, and easier than 'shared thinking' for educators to conceptualise as a goal for working with young children. An ideal conversation is one where adults engage in reciprocity and treat children as equal conversational partners. Such adult conversational partners believe that children have worthwhile things to say, and support a child's "attempts to communicate and extend his or her contributions".<sup>58</sup> Extended purposive conversations are dynamic, collaborative, reciprocal and dialogic exchanges characterised by interaction strategies deliberately exploited by educators to enhance cognitive, social and linguistic skills in young children. As discussed in 3.4.1 *Teacher Interaction and Language Scale*, the scale includes 'extend' and 'expand'.

### 2.2.3 Underpinning Concepts of Extended Purposive Conversations

Engaging children in episodes of extended purposive conversations is underpinned by ideas of intersubjectivity, joint involvement, co-construction and meaning making, interactional/transactional process, and collaboration, among others. These terms will be defined before proceeding further, although each is dependent on the other, and some interpretations overlap.

Underpinning the processes of extended purposive conversations is the concept of *intersubjectivity*.<sup>59</sup> Trevarthen<sup>60</sup> is credited with introducing the term to developmental psychology, in particular in the context of interpersonal communication between infants and their mothers.<sup>61</sup> It is an extension of the term subjectivity which implies awareness of oneself as a sentient, cognisant being. Subjectivity occurs within individuals, intersubjectivity occurs between people. From a socio-cultural perspective, Trevarthen argues that intersubjectivity is the motivation, medium and outcome of learning. It is a continual process of meaning making; the construction and reconstruction of joint purposes between a child as innate companion and co-participant.<sup>62</sup> This mutual understanding between people is an integrating dynamic process based on a common focus of attention and some shared presumptions that form the basis for communication.<sup>63</sup> Schaffer puts it in colloquial terms when he describes achieving intersubjectivity as being "on the same wavelength".<sup>64</sup> Meanings are negotiated, not transmitted or imposed on passive recipients. There is a mutual engagement with the understandings and feelings of the other.

In order to develop intersubjectivity there must be a shared focus of attention. Schaffer<sup>65</sup> focussed on the kinds of interactions, or '*joint involvement episodes*', that appeared to him to play a particularly significant role in progressing development. According to Schaffer, "Joint involvement episodes refers to any encounter between two individuals in which the participants pay joint attention to, and jointly act upon, some external topic". Within the shared frame of reference adult activity takes mostly two forms: supportive and challenging. The former serves to maintain the child's current focus of attention. Behaviours include holding objects, arranging objects in order for easier access, or verbally labelling events. The latter takes a more proactive form especially in problem-solving situations where the child has to be assisted to reach a goal. Schaffer maintains that children's behaviour is richer and more complex during episodes of joint involvement than at other times. This suggests, as proposed by Vygotsky, that such episodes "can elicit optimal and most advanced performances in children" (p. 254). Therefore an ability to organise children's attention in joint involvement episodes would appear to be an essential component in educators' behaviour and "the onus is on the adult to promote sharing of a topic" (p. 264).

The successful contributions of adults (parents and educators) in shared interactions with young children were identified.<sup>66</sup> These contributions included having a shared focus of attention, an attitude of reciprocity, and both adults and children participating as equal conversational partners with adults striving to support and extend children's utterances. Wells speaks of 'sustaining strategies' and 'sustained episodes'. Adults (parents), by using rising tones and engagement in the conversation, conveyed the clear message that they are listening, engrossed in what is being said and would like to hear more. Wells refers to how in the pre-school years conversation is most effective, in enhancing children's development of language, "when it is collaborative, when it is a joint construction".<sup>67</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Op cite, p. 7

<sup>59</sup> Op cite

<sup>60</sup> Trevarthen, C. (1980). The foundations of intersubjectivity: Development of interpersonal and cooperative understanding in infants. In D.R. Olson (Ed.). *Social foundations of language and thought* (pp. 316-342). New York: Norton.

<sup>61</sup> Schaffer, H. R. (2006). Key concepts in developmental psychology. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>62</sup> Trevarthen, C. (1998). The child's need to learn a culture. In Woodhead, M., Faulkner, D. & Littleton, K. (Eds.). *Cultural worlds of early childhood* (pp. 87-100). London: Routledge.

<sup>63</sup> Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in a social context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>64</sup> Schaffer, H. R. (2006). Key concepts in developmental psychology. London: Sage Publications. P.155

<sup>65</sup> Schaffer, H. R. (1996). Joint involvement episodes as contexts for development. In H. Daniels (Ed.). *An introduction to Vygotsky* (pp. 251-280). London: Routledge. p. 253

<sup>66</sup> Wells. G. (1985). *Language, learning and education*. Berkshire: NFER-Nelson.

<sup>67</sup> Op cite, p.15

Children learn actively through exploration of the physical world. As they interact with the concrete world and make sense of it, they construct their own meaning, personal knowledge and understanding. Social constructivists develop Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism and believe that it is principally through negotiating meaning in social interaction with others that children learn.<sup>68</sup> Socio-cultural theorists extend that concept to include that knowledge is also culturally constructed. Knowledge, which is culturally constructed, is acquired through active engagement with people, ideas and materials in their socio-cultural context. *Co-construction and meaning-making* involve adults becoming aware of children's knowledge and understanding and engaging with that; developing excellent dialogue skills and interest and enthusiasm to discover more about the child's topic of interest. Echoing Rogoff's concepts of expert and novice, children's knowledge is acknowledged as expert and as valid as the adults.<sup>69</sup> Jacoby and Ochs<sup>70</sup> refer to co-construction as "the joint creation of a form, interpretation ... emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality". The focus is on developing intersubjectivity, rather than achieving a specific learning outcome or direction which may exist in the mind of an educator. The 'co' prefix covers a range of interactional/transactional processes, including coordination, collaboration and cooperation. Having outlined the underpinning concepts of guided participation, intersubjectivity, co-construction, and meaning making, enabling extended purposive conversations between educators and children is now considered in the context of interaction strategies.

## 2.2.4 Interaction Strategies

Children are social beings, learning through interactions in activities, in the context of reciprocal relationships. This section incorporates the particular interaction strategies that the literature suggests enhances children's learning and is central to the Hanen Programme. These strategies include establishing a supportive interpersonal environment incorporating encouragement as opposed to praise, active listening, discussing/questioning and modelling. Children also need opportunities to talk about things that are important to them. The first strategy is now explored.

### *Establishing a supportive interpersonal environment*

The literature is clear on the importance of children building positive relationships with an emotionally and physically present adult available in their social context.<sup>71</sup> Research from a variety of theoretical perspectives suggests that a defining feature of a supportive environment is a responsible and responsive adult. Adults who are not responsive to children and who may locate themselves nearby but not engage in children's play, fail to optimise children's learning. In that situation, children's social interactions and cognitive activities are less complex.<sup>72</sup> In the REPEY project where educators demonstrated warmth and were particularly responsive to the individual needs of children, children showed better social behavioural outcomes (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).<sup>73</sup> Learning is seen as a reciprocal and collaborative process between the adult and child.

### **Encouragement as opposed to praise**

Encouragement is the psychological support given by one person to inspire or enable another with the confidence (or courage) to undertake a task. It suggests support of a child's activities through approval or help.<sup>74</sup> A focus on encouragement to support children's self-esteem has long been acknowledged. Hendrick<sup>75</sup> advocated the expression of unconditional positive regard towards every child as the fundamental prerequisite to developing children's abilities to explore and to foster a sense of self-esteem. This is in addition to the provision of recognition and acknowledgement for attainment of competence and an expression of genuine respect for every child. Open-ended and creative experiences (for example playing with sand or water, block play, painting, drawing and so on) provide the greatest opportunities for experiencing competence. Interpersonal competence is of utmost importance. The more opportunities children have to acquire interpersonal skills, through the support of an encouraging adult, the more likely they are to acquire an inner conviction of their own ability to cope.

<sup>68</sup> MacNaughton, G. & Williams, G. (2004). *Teaching young children: Choices in theory and practice*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

<sup>69</sup> Jordan, B. (2009). Scaffolding learning and co-constructing understanding. In A. Anning, J. Cullen, and M. Fleer (Eds.). *Early childhood education: Society and culture* (2nd ed.) (pp.39-52). London: Sage Publications.

<sup>70</sup> Jacoby, S & Ochs, E. (1995). Co-construction: An introduction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 28(3), 171-183., p.171

<sup>71</sup> Bowman, B., Donovan, S. & Burns, S., eds., (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers*. Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>72</sup> Op cite

<sup>73</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S, Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Research Report No. 356. London: Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>74</sup> French, G. & Murphy, P. (2005). *Once in a lifetime: Early childhood care and education for children from birth to three*. Dublin: Barnardos. p.???

<sup>75</sup> Hendrick, J. (1996). *The whole child* (6th ed.). USA: MacMillan

<sup>76</sup> Tompkins, M. (1991). In praise of praising less. *HighScope Extensions* (September: 1-3), Michigan: High/Scope Press

Praise, well intentioned as it is, has been shown through research and practice to invite comparison and competition between children and to increase children's dependence on adults.<sup>76</sup> Too much praise can make children anxious about their abilities, reluctant to take risks, try new things and unsure of how to evaluate their own work. Praise has been identified as not conducive to self-reliance, self-direction, or self-control. If adults as authority figures can judge positively, they can also judge negatively. To judge at all takes away from children's ability to judge their own efforts<sup>77</sup>. These arguments have been echoed by Kohn<sup>78</sup> who cites five reasons to stop saying "Good Job". These are:

- *Manipulating children* by reinforcing things that makes our lives a little easier, thus taking advantage of children's dependence;
- *Creating praise junkies* by saying "I like the way you...." or "Good sitting" children come to rely on our evaluations, our decisions about what's good and bad, rather than learning to form their own judgements;
- *Stealing a child's pleasure* by taking away their delight and pride in what they have accomplished. Children deserve to decide when to feel that way. Every time we say, "Good job!" we are telling a child how to feel. It is important that children share their joy with adults, not pursue what we think.
- *Withdrawal of children's interest* once the appraiser's attention is removed. "Good painting!" may get children to keep painting for as long as we keep watching and praising. But, Kohn echoes Lilian Katz's warning, "once attention is withdrawn" many children "won't touch the activity again."
- *Reducing achievement* by interfering with how good a job children actually do. Researchers find that children who are praised for doing well at a creative task tend to stumble at the next task – and they don't do as well as children who weren't praised to begin with.

Kohn highlights that it is difficult to find discouraging words about what is called positive reinforcement. His point is not to question the importance of encouraging and supporting children, and the need to hug them, love them and enable them to feel good about themselves. The reason praise can work in the short term is that young children are hungry for our approval. But we have a responsibility not to exploit that dependence for our own convenience. Kohn stresses that this doesn't mean that all compliments and expressions of delight are harmful, just that we need to consider our motives for what we say (a genuine expression of enthusiasm is better than a desire to manipulate the child's future behaviour) as well as the actual effects of doing so. He advocates for saying nothing, commenting on what you see and talk less, ask more. These themes will be picked up in 5 *Impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on Quality* in relation to a potential (but resolvable) conflict between Hanen and the HighScope approach.

### Active Listening

Seminal studies of interactions between educators and children in institutional contexts, schools and early childhood settings, have revealed that educators spent significantly more time talking to, rather than listening to, children.<sup>79, 80, 81</sup> One study reported that many educators are poor listeners who remain distracted, pre-occupied and forgetful seventy five per cent of the time.<sup>82</sup> This is in contrast to findings from studies in the home<sup>83</sup>, which suggest that linguistic progress is attributable to: (1) responsive sensitivity and acceptance of young children's utterances, combined with non-directive interaction from the parents, and (2) the frequency with which adults intentionally aim to understand children's meaning and expand and extend it. Listening is both an active and a reciprocal verb.<sup>84</sup> This suggests that educators need sensitivity to the children's current state, a desire to interpret their meaning, and for them to participate in the interaction. In other words educators need to actively listen. These are the characteristics of conversations (at any age) where there is a genuine desire to achieve mutual understanding.<sup>85</sup> Wells emphasises that such characteristics are particularly important when interacting with a less experienced conversationalist.

<sup>77</sup> Hitz, R. & Driscoll, A. (1988). *Praise or encouragement? New Insights into Praise: Implications for Early Childhood Teachers*. USA: Young Children.

<sup>78</sup> Kohn, A. (2001). Five reasons to stop saying "Good job!", *Young Children*, September 2001.

<sup>79</sup> Flanders, N. (1970). *Analyzing teacher behaviour*. New York: Wiley.

<sup>80</sup> Wells, G. (1982). *Language, learning and education*. Bristol: Bristol University.

<sup>81</sup> Tizard, B. & Hughes, M. (2002). *Young children learning*. (2nd ed.). UK: Blackwell Publishing.

<sup>82</sup> Renck Jalongo, M. (1995). Promoting active listening in the classroom. *Childhood Education*, 72(1), 13-18. Cited in MacNaughton, G. & Williams, G. (2004). *Teaching young children: Choices in theory and practice*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

<sup>83</sup> Wells, G. (1985). *Language, learning and education*. Berkshire: NFER-Nelson.

<sup>84</sup> Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. Oxon: Routledge.

<sup>85</sup> Wells, G. (1985). *Language, learning and education*. Berkshire: NFER-Nelson.

Otherwise children's learning becomes dominated by educators' directions, thoughts and expectations. Children do not have opportunities then, to direct their own learning. Through active listening, valuable insights into how children may be feeling and their general development may be gained.<sup>86</sup> Children's stories and home lives can be a rich source of interaction. Such events can be utilised to enable episodes of shared thinking between educators and children.

### **Discussing/questioning**

From the perspective of educators the importance of *questioning* and attention to children's responses, have long been identified.<sup>86, 87, 89</sup> It should be noted that some educators' questioning styles may impede rather than stimulate conversation. Fisher cited a study where it was found that the more educators asked questions the less likely they were to receive questions, promote elaborate responses and encourage spontaneous contributions in dialogue from children.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni analysed and categorised the range of questions asked by educators in the REPEY study which pointed to the preponderance of closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions did not contribute to extending children's thinking in conversations.<sup>91</sup>

Alexander<sup>92</sup> advises that if educators want young people to learn to talk in order to talk to learn; what children say is more important than what the educator says. In his study there were clear differences in those questions and responses which were channelled into cognitively challenging and meaningful sequences and those hampered by rote repetitive 'initiation-response' interactions. Learning to use questioning effectively is therefore a challenge but critically important for early childhood educators.

### **Modelling**

According to Siraj-Blatchford et al. modelling includes "the demonstration of activities accompanied by the child's attention and interest as well as a verbal commentary from the adult".<sup>93</sup> Wells noted that parents rarely engaged in direct teaching. However, their influence could be seen in the modelling of mature behaviours, taking conversational turns, negotiating meaning, and sustaining interest.<sup>94</sup> As previously discussed, in relation to Teacher Talk (see 1.3.2 Programme contents), language-modelling strategies build children's receptive and expressive language skills, as well as their emergent literacy knowledge by providing models of more advanced oral language and emergent literacy knowledge.

In reference to three and four year olds, Tizard and Hughes point to the fundamental significance of creating a common referent between adults and children, in their words "a shared world of common experience to act as a backcloth to their conversation".<sup>95</sup>

### **Opportunities to enable episodes of extended purposive conversations**

Story reading provides wonderful opportunities to engage in joint involvement. A pre-requisite for extended purposive conversations to occur between adults and young children is to engage children in joint activity. Engaging in extended purposive conversations requires educators to be proactive and use a number of devices to create a common knowledge between educators and children, thereby creating rich opportunities to extend children's language and thinking. This could include observing children and their interests, gathering information about children's interests or happenings in the home, creating exciting experiences and mutual endeavours. In planned experiences it also involves adjusting and tuning-in to children's perspectives, sharing control and supporting children to exert their agency. Research reveals that there is no one ideal strategy to enhance children's learning and development and that many strategies may be employed successfully.<sup>96</sup>

## **2.3 Quality in early childhood education and care settings**

This is a critical moment in the development and provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Ireland. There is an unprecedented policy focus on ECEC for children generally in the years before compulsory schooling, and in particular children of three and four years of age who now have a universal right to attend a Free Preschool Year. There is a sound research basis for this focus. Studies demonstrate that for all young children, particularly those living with the injustice of poverty and social exclusion, high quality education and care can lead to better school achievement, higher cognitive test scores, less special education placements and higher school retention rates.<sup>97, 98</sup> However, poor quality provision relates to poorer functioning and therefore damages children.<sup>99</sup>

High quality education and care is ensured by one key factor the quality of the educators. High quality educators are responsive and sensitive to the individual children's needs, and stimulate the cognitive development of the children.<sup>100</sup> The structural environment is also significant. High quality structural





- 86 Epstein, A. (2007). *The intentional teacher: Choosing the best strategies for young children's learning*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- 87 Alexander, R. (2008). Essays on pedagogy. Oxon: Routledge. *American Educational Research Journal* 35(2), 333-349.
- 88 Fisher, R. (2001). *Teaching children to learn*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd.
- 89 Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Manni, L. (2008). 'Would you like to tidy up now?' An analysis of adult questioning in the English Foundation Stage. *Early Years*, 28(1), 5-22.
- 90 Fisher, R. (2001). *Teaching children to learn*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd.
- 91 Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Manni, L. (2008). 'Would you like to tidy up now?' An analysis of adult questioning in the English Foundation Stage. *Early Years*, 28(1), 5-22.
- 92 Alexander, R. (2003). Oracy, literacy and pedagogy. In E. Bearne, H. Dombay, & T. Grainger, (Eds.), *Classroom interactions in literacy* (pp. 23-35). Berkshire: Open University Press.
- 93 Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years. Research Report No. 356*. London: Department for Education and Skills, p.144.
- 94 Wells, G. (1985). *Language, learning and education*. Berkshire: NFER-Nelson.
- 95 Tizard, B. & Hughes, M. (2002). *Young children learning*. (2nd ed.). UK: Blackwell Publishing. p.63
- 96 Bowman, B., Donovan, S. & Burns, S., eds., (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers*. Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- 97 Schweinhart, L.J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C.R., & Nores, M. (2004). *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40. Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation*, 14. Ypsilanti, Michigan: High/Scope Press.
- 98 Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2010). *Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 Project (EPPSE 3-14) Final Report from the Key Stage 3 Phase: Influences on Students' Development From age 11 – 14*. London: Department of Education.
- 99 Melhuish, E., Belsky, J., MacPherson, K & Cullis, A. (2010). *The quality of group childcare settings used by 3-4 year old children in Sure Start Local Programme areas and the relationship with child outcomes*. London: Department of Education.
- 100 Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years. Research Report No. 356*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

environments contain high staff-child ratios, small group size, ongoing and professional training. The physical learning environment contributes to quality early education when it is aesthetically pleasing with a rich variety of materials which stimulate curiosity and exploration, carefully arranged and stored for accessibility in interest/learning areas.<sup>101, 102</sup> Studies have demonstrated that high quality early childhood settings are characterised by:

- an equal emphasis on social and cognitive development, where both are seen as complementary;
- staff knowledge and understanding of child development and learning, and providing appropriate cognitive challenge;
- strategic planning for a wide range of curriculum experiences; and
- the quality of adult-child verbal interactions through open-ended questioning and extension of children's thoughts.<sup>103</sup>

It is acknowledged that "the single most important determinant of high quality ECEC is the interaction between children and staff".<sup>104</sup> A comprehensive study conducted in the United States was designed to identify the factors that make the greatest difference to three and four year old children's outcomes.<sup>105</sup> The purpose of the study was to make recommendations to policy makers on where to best direct resources. The data revealed that goals for early education may only be achievable if programmes ensure high-quality teacher-child interactions.

In addition a balance between child-initiated and adult-initiated experiences and between an open-framework approach, where children have free choice in instructive environments, and more focused group work with direct instruction was in evidence in the most effective early childhood settings.<sup>106</sup> When children use their initiative in child-initiated experiences they are motivated to begin and follow through on any given task. When supported to follow their own interests, children's engagement is confident and purposeful.<sup>107</sup> It is logical, therefore, that children engage in conversations that they initiate themselves and that are grounded in their own interests. They become active agents in the conversation and of their own learning rather than passive recipients of educator-directed learning.<sup>108</sup> The onus is on the educator to ascertain children's interests, to design experiences which capitalise on those interests and to exploit opportunities that arise to engage in conversation with the children.

Well-designed early education programmes are shown to engender benefits for the participants themselves, government and society.<sup>109</sup> These benefits are reported to outweigh the costs.<sup>110</sup> "A number of longitudinal studies have shown rates of return from \$4 to \$17 for every dollar invested" over the life cycle.<sup>111</sup> The case has been made in Ireland for "targeting expenditure where returns are greatest".<sup>112</sup> To finalise this sub-section the following Figure 2 encapsulates all that is required to ensure quality interactions in early childhood settings. It illustrates a conceptual framework of the components of extended purposive conversations.

<sup>101</sup> Op cite

<sup>102</sup> Epstein, A. (2007). *Essentials of active learning in preschool*. Ypsilanti, Michigan: High/Scope Press.

<sup>103</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Mutton, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Research Report No. 356. London: Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>104</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (2006). *Strong Foundations: Early childhood care and education*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, p.6.

<sup>105</sup> Burchinal, M., Vandergrift, N., Pianta, R., & Mashburn, A. (2010). Threshold analysis of association between child care quality and child outcomes for low income children in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 166-176.

<sup>106</sup> Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2005). *Effective pre-school and primary education 3-11 project (EPPE 3-11)*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference, University of Glamorgan, Wales, 14th - 17th September 2005.

<sup>107</sup> Hohmann, M., Weikart, D. & Epstein, A. (2008). *Educating young children*, (2nd ed.). USA: The High/Scope Press.

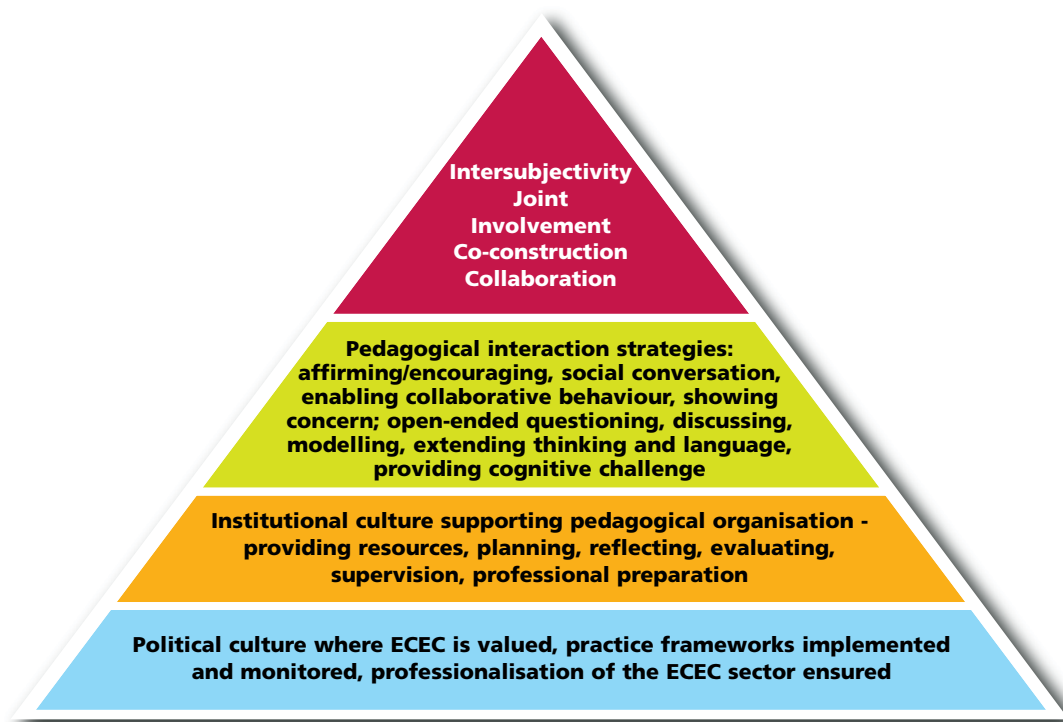
<sup>108</sup> Op cite

<sup>109</sup> Karoly, L.A. & Bigelow, J.H. (2005). *The economics of investing in universal preschool education in California*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

<sup>110</sup> Heckman, J. (2006). *The economics of investing in children*. UCD Geary Institute, Research Analysis Evidence, Policy Briefing No. 1. Dublin: University College Dublin.

<sup>111</sup> National Economic and Social Council. (2009). *Well-being matters: A social report for Ireland*. NESR Report No. 119, Vol II. Dublin: National Social and Economic Council, p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> National Competitiveness Council. (2009). *Statement on education and training*, Dublin: National Competitiveness Council, p.20.



**Figure 2 Building blocks of extended purposive conversations**

## **2.4 Process of intervention delivery**

The Communication Trust in the UK has worked with the Better Communication Research Programme to develop the What Works database of evidenced interventions to support children's speech, language and communication.<sup>113</sup> The What Works database has now been launched as a prototype with around 60 interventions included. As a result of the project key principles to consider before using an intervention were identified.

### **2.4.1 Key principles to consider before using a speech, language and communication intervention**

Some principles will relate to individual children, others to the context or setting. It was acknowledged that no intervention will work in isolation, neither will it be a "fix all" for all children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and all interventions must be considered in the context of the school or setting:

- Evidence suggests that fundamental to success is that leaders take a strategic approach in order to support interventions being systematically embedded in practice.
- Partnership with parents and children is essential.
- Ensure early identification systems and strategies are in place.
- Ensure children's needs are accurately identified; meaningful targets are set in collaboration with parents and young people and evaluated.
- Evaluate the success of interventions in terms of positive outcomes for children.
- Plan and implement systematic workforce development.
- Develop joint working with local or independent speech and language therapy services.

<sup>113</sup> Key principles to consider before using an intervention <https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/schools/what-works/keyprinciples.aspx>. Retrieved 1.11.2013



## 2.4.2 The role of Speech and Language Therapists

Speech and language therapists play an important role in supporting early childhood settings and schools to meet the needs of children with SLCN and in supporting good practice across universal, targeted and specialist approaches. They have a distinct role in assessing, planning, delivering and evaluating support for children and young people with SLCN.

All children need environments which support development of speech, language and communication skills. Levels of knowledge and expertise will vary between settings depending on the children's needs and the professionals involved. Speech and Language Therapists are key partners for early childhood settings/schools/local authorities and early years settings where they can carry out the following:

- Supporting senior leaders to ensure communication supportive practice throughout their early childhood settings or school.
- Assessment; including screening or more specific assessment of individuals to determine specific areas of need and strategies to support development.
- Workforce development, including training, and modelling support for other adults.
- Delivery of programmes for specific groups or individuals.
- Working with families and other professionals.
- Supporting good practice in the classroom.
- Supporting educational target setting and evaluation.
- Working with others to support targeted interventions and support for children, through direct work, supporting others through training or mentoring.
- For children with specific SLCN the Speech and Language Therapist will play a vital role in working directly with the child within the early childhood settings and school as well as supporting the educators to differentiate the curriculum appropriately and providing necessary training.

Some organisations in Ireland have incorporated a focus on speech, language and communication into their early childhood programmes. The early childhood strand of the Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative included a Speech and Language Therapist as part of the team. That role was extended to schools and is successfully maintained. In an evaluation of the Speech and Language Therapy Service of Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) it was recorded that while 'speech and language therapy services are provided by the HSE [Health Service Executive] in the area, demand exceeded supply of the service (Source: CDI staff). Waiting times for speech and language therapy in the HSE service are long (15-18 months currently), although the process is under revision (Source: HSE SLT).<sup>114</sup> Because the service was embedded directly within the early childhood settings and schools, children were seen at a much earlier age and they were likely to be seen without a lengthy wait (on average seen within two weeks). It was recommended to offer speech and language therapy services directly to early childhood settings. This approach involved onsite mentoring. Our attention is now turned to a consideration of effective in-service training.

## 2.4.3 Effective in-service education

An American study, using a sample of 1,027 mathematics and science teachers, provided the first large-scale empirical comparison of effects of different characteristics of professional development on educators' learning.<sup>115</sup> Results indicated features of professional development activities that have significant, positive effects on educators' self-reported increases in knowledge and skills and changes in classroom practice: a focus on content knowledge; opportunities throughout the training for active learning which in turn was dependent on the form of the in-service education (workshop, onsite mentoring, mentoring versus study group); coherence with other learning activities; collective participation of educators from the same school/setting, and the duration of the programme.

<sup>114</sup> Hayes, N., Keegan, S. & Goulding, E. (2012). *Evaluation of the Speech and Language Therapy Service of Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Centre for Social and Educational Research, p.6.

<sup>115</sup> Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 915-945.

*A focus on content knowledge* - professional development that focuses on subject-matter content and how children learn it is especially important in changing teaching practice. In the context of the Language Enrichment Programme the focus includes participants' understanding of the components as described in 1.3.2 Programme contents.

*Promoting active learning* - concerns the opportunities provided by the professional development activity for teachers to become actively engaged in meaningful discussion, planning, and practice. Some examples given were observing and being observed. One element of active learning is the opportunity for teachers to observe expert teachers, be observed teaching in their own classroom, and obtain feedback. These opportunities can take a variety of forms, including providing feedback on videotaped lessons, having teachers visit each other's classrooms to observe lessons, and having activity leaders, lead teachers, and mentors observe classroom teachers and engage in reflective discussions about the goals of a lesson, the tasks employed, teaching strategies, and student learning. A second element of active learning involves the opportunity to link the ideas introduced during professional development experiences by planning classroom implementation.

*Fostering Coherence* - concerns the extent to which professional development activities are perceived by teachers to be a part of a coherent programme of teacher learning. Professional development for teachers is frequently criticised on the ground that the activities are disconnected from one another-in other words, individual activities do not form part of a coherent programme of teacher learning and development. The coherence of a teacher's professional development was assessed in three ways: the extent to which it builds on what teachers have already learned; emphasizes content and pedagogy aligned with national, state and local standards, frameworks, and assessments; and supports teachers in developing sustained, ongoing professional communication with other teachers who are trying to change their teaching in similar ways.

*Collective participation* - there is a growing interest in professional development that is designed for groups of teachers from the same setting or school due a number of potential advantages. First, those who work together are more likely to have the opportunity to discuss concepts, skills, and problems that arise during their professional development experiences. Second, those who are from the same setting or school are likely to share common curriculum materials, courses, and assessment requirements. They may be able to integrate what they learn with other aspects of their instructional context. Third, teachers who share the same students can discuss students' needs. Finally, by focusing on a group of teachers from the same setting/school, professional development may help sustain changes in practice over time and help contribute to a shared professional culture; a common understanding of instructional goals, methods, problems, and solutions.

*Duration* - professional development must be sustained over time. Longer programmes are more likely to provide opportunities for in-depth discussion of content, conceptions, misconceptions, and pedagogical strategies. Extended programmes are more likely to allow teachers to try out new practices in the classroom and obtain feedback on their teaching.

In conclusion sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have an impact, as reported by teachers, than is shorter professional development. Professional development that focuses on academic subject matter (content), gives teachers opportunities for "hands-on" work (active learning), and is integrated into the daily life of the school, is more likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills. "Activities that are linked to teachers' other experiences, aligned with other reform efforts, and encouraging of professional communication among teachers appear to support change in teaching practice, even after the effects of enhanced knowledge and skills are taken into account."<sup>116</sup>

## Summary

This chapter addresses the importance of speech, language and communication development from five perspectives: a right of children, central to children's learning and development, dependant on the kinds of experiences provided to children from birth, crucial to children's life chances, particularly if speech and language difficulties go undiagnosed and a key factor in mitigating educational inequality. Early childhood settings have a significant role in providing the kinds of language, literacy and social experiences that will support children to engage with and make the kinds of meanings that are expected at school. These language, literacy and social experiences are mainly mediated through interactions.

<sup>116</sup> Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 915-945.

The concept of 'extended purposive conversations' is explored. Extended purposive conversations can be clearly identified in the literature as an educational dimension to aspire to in early childhood facilities. The underpinning concepts of extended purposive conversations which include intersubjectivity, joint involvement, co-construction and meaning making and collaboration are presented. The literature suggests that interaction strategies that engage children in extended purposive conversations are especially effective in enhancing children's educational outcomes. These strategies involve establishing a supportive interpersonal environment, encouraging versus praising children, active listening, discussing/questioning and modelling whilst providing opportunities to enable episodes of extended purposive conversations.

The importance of quality in early childhood settings is emphasised. Studies demonstrate that for young children, particularly those at risk of educational inequality, high quality education and care can lead to better school achievement, higher cognitive test scores, less special education placements and higher school retention rates. However, poor quality provision relates to poorer functioning and therefore damages children. Studies have also demonstrated that high quality early childhood settings are characterised by the quality of adult-child verbal interactions through open-ended questioning and extension of children's thoughts, in addition to other factors.

The process of intervention delivery with a focus on the key principles to consider before using a speech and language intervention is considered. The important role of Speech and Language Therapists in assessing, planning, delivering and evaluating support for children with speech language and communication needs and supporting early childhood settings and schools is discussed.

The indicators of effective in-service education are addressed. Such education includes a focus on content knowledge; opportunities throughout the training for active learning which in turn was dependent on the form of the in-service education (workshop, onsite mentoring); coherence with other learning activities; collective participation of educators from the same school/setting, and the duration of the programme.

The next chapter considers the methods used to conduct this evaluation.





# Chapter 3

## Methodology

### 3. Methodology

This chapter sets out the research design and the process of data collection for this evaluation in seven parts. The first part details the purpose and terms of the evaluation. The second part details the research questions. This is followed by the research design in part three. The fourth part profiles the methods used – the sources, detail and range of data collected. In the fifth part the process of the evaluation is outlined. In part six ethical considerations are explained. The limitations of the evaluation are outlined in the seventh part along with how those limitations were addressed. Finally a summary is offered.

#### 3.1 Purpose and terms of the evaluation

The evaluation of the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme relates to four early childhood settings in Ballyfermot. It is hoped that this local level evaluation will complement and add value to the overall evaluation of the National Early Years Access Initiative.<sup>117</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Purpose

The overall purpose of the evaluation is to evaluate the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the practice of the educators in the settings and to evaluate the impact that the intervention has had on the wider quality of provision in the four settings.

##### 3.1.2 The terms of the evaluation

The evaluation process was based on gathering data at baseline in April 2012 at the beginning of the Programme and follow up data at the end of the Programme in June 2013 with the production of a final report.

#### 3.2 Research questions

The evaluation centres on two research questions:

1. What is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the educators' interactions?
2. What is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the setting?

#### 3.3 Research design

There are four early childhood settings included in this evaluation. These settings were the first to participate in the Language Enrichment Programme. Three of the four participating settings completed the training at the time of final data collection. Therefore some of the evaluation findings refer to those three settings.

This study focuses on the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the educators' interactions in their naturalistic setting, that is, as the educators and children go about their typical interactions and activities in the early childhood settings. The potential impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the overall quality of the settings was also under consideration. The methods used to answer the two research questions above involved:

- Analysis of 36 films of the 18 educators' interactions using the *Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale*. The films were taken by the SLT at the beginning and at the end of the Language Enrichment Programme in the three settings who had completed the training at that time
- Direct observations of the four settings and analysis using the *Programme Quality Assessment* and a *Literacy and Numeracy Indicator Scheme*
- Interviews with 19 participating educators and managers of the settings
- Coding and analysis of those interviews and six written testimonies of changes to practice as result of participating in the Programme

<sup>117</sup> McKeown, K., Haase, T., & Pratschke, J. (2014). *Child outcomes in the early years: A study of child outcomes in 2012/13 Free Pre-School Year. Final Report on Evaluation of NEYAI and Sólta Programmes*. Dublin: Pobal.

Other evaluation actions involved:

- Scrutinising responses from parents and educators on evaluation sheets completed immediately after the sessions and those completed as part of the overall project.
- Writing a final evaluation reporting on any change in practice

With its combination of observation of practice, interview and assessment of filmed interactions between educators and young children, the study falls within a qualitative paradigm. Qualitative researchers attempt to access the research participant's perspective by means of detailed observation and interviewing.<sup>118</sup> It should be noted that parents were not included in this evaluation. However, the internal evaluation sheets documented by the co-ordinator of the project are detailed in full in *Appendix 3 Internal Evaluations*.

### 3.4 Details of the methods used

The methods used at baseline and follow-up included the Hanen Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale, the Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA), and a literacy and numeracy indicator. In addition interviews were held at follow-up. The following section gives a brief description of each of the instruments and the questions asked at interview.

#### 3.4.1 Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale

The Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale can help SLTs and educators adapt the *Hanen Learning Language and Loving It Program* to the needs of educators. It provides an objective way of evaluating how educators integrate Hanen strategies into their everyday interactions with children.<sup>119</sup> It is designed to evaluate educator's interactions prior to and following participation in a programme. The 11 items of the rating scale incorporates:

*Wait and Listen* (wait for children to initiate, use slow pace and let children finish their message)

*Follow the Lead* (respond to children's initiations, use animation, avoid directions and vague acknowledgments)

*Join in and Play* (evaluated only if the children were are preverbal or at one word stage - build on child's focus of interest without dominating)

*Face to Face* (adjust physical level to be face to face with children)

*Use a Variety of Questions* (to encourage conversation, use open-ended – what happened? how did you do that? why do you think that happened? - questions, and avoid test and rhetorical questions)

*Encourage verbal Turn Taking* (invite the child to take a turn, respond with animation, wait for a response, balancing turn-taking)

*Scan* (carefully observe each child to facilitate her/his participation and interaction in small groups)

*Imitate* (imitate the actions, gestures, sounds of pre-verbal children)

*Use a Variety of labels* (use nouns, verbs, adjectives and include unfamiliar words);

*Expand* (expand on what the child says)

*Extend the Topic* (by modelling decontextualized language)

It is a seven-point scale based upon the frequency of occurrence of a strategy, ranging from 'Almost never' (1), 'Sometimes' (3), 'Frequently' (5), and 'Consistently' (7). Ratings of one to three indicates a programme goal; a rating of four indicates fine tuning and a programme goal, ratings of five to seven indicates that the educators use of a strategy achieves expectations.<sup>120</sup>

The Rating Scale helps Speech and Language Therapists/educators to set goals, document educator's progress, acquire objective outcome data, evaluate 11 interactive behaviours derived from the *Learning Language and Loving It* guidebook and provide a profile of an educator's use of child-centred, interaction-promoting and language-promoting strategies. It is accompanied by a User's Guide.

<sup>118</sup> Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.hanen.org/Shop/Products/Teacher-Interaction-and-Language-Rating-Scale.aspx> Retrieved 13.11.2013

<sup>120</sup> Girolametto, L., Greenberg, J. & Weitzman, E. (2000). *Teacher interaction and language rating scale; User's guide*. Canada: The Hanen Programme.

In the evaluation 9 of the 11 rating scales were used for analysis. The evaluation excluded rating 'Join in and play' in the follow-up evaluation as the item for 'Join in and play' only applied to the first set of films rated at baseline. It did not apply to the second set of films as these were about story reading which was adult initiated and the children were verbal. Similarly 'Imitate' was not applicable at baseline and follow-up. 'Imitate' is evaluated only if the children were are preverbal or at one word stage only. The majority of children in the videos were verbal.

### 3.4.2 Preschool Program Quality Assessment

The Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a rating instrument designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programmes and identify staff training needs. The Preschool PQA is reliable and valid and is appropriate for use in all centre based early childhood settings, including but not limited to those using the HighScope educational approach.<sup>121</sup>

The evaluation focussed on the findings from the observable practice. The PQA Form A covers 39 dimensions of program quality in four domains: learning environment, daily routine, adult-child interaction, curriculum planning and assessment.

The dimensions of the *learning environment* include safety and health, a focus on the outdoor space, defined interest areas which are logically located and which have organised and labelled materials, which are varied, open-ended, and plentiful and reflect the diversity of the children in the setting. Finally attention is paid to how children's work is displayed.

The dimensions of the *daily routine* include consistency, flexibility and sufficient time for each part of the day to include time for child planning, child –initiated activities and child review/recall. Other segments of the day include small and large group times, choices during transition times and clean-up, meal-times and outside time.

In relation to *adult children interaction* the dimensions include meeting basic physical needs, handling separation from home, having a warm and caring atmosphere, support for child communication, support for non-English speakers, adults as partners in play, encouragement of children's initiatives, support for child learning at group times, opportunities for child exploration, acknowledgement of children's efforts, encouragement for peer interactions, independent problem-solving and conflict resolution.

Finally in relation to *curriculum planning and assessment* there is a focus on the curriculum model, team teaching, comprehensive child records, anecdotal note taking by staff and use of child observation measures.

It is a five point rating scale based upon the quality level for each dimension. Supporting evidence is recorded to justify the rating (notes of what adults or children do or say, material lists, drawings of room layout, and sequences of routines or events).<sup>122</sup> Raters observe the programme and interview the appropriate staff members. They record supporting evidence for each component of every dimension.

### 3.4.3 Literacy and Numeracy Indicator

The literacy and numeracy indicator is designed to prompt the rater to find evidence of literacy and numeracy practices in early childhood settings. The instrument was drawn from Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart<sup>123</sup> and adapted by French.<sup>124</sup> The indicator contains six criteria in relation to literacy and four criteria in relation to numeracy. Each criterion is subdivided into more detailed sub-criteria. There are 18 such subdivisions for literacy and 15 for numeracy. The literacy and numeracy indicator is scored by scoring one for every occurrence of a sub-criterion. The score achieved is then rated as follows: evidence of literacy (N=18) Minimal (1-6) Moderate (7-12) Maximal (13-18) Evidence Numeracy (N=15) Minimal (1-5) Moderate (6-10) Maximal (11-15).

#### *The criteria and sub-criteria in relation to literacy are:*

*Environmental print* (educators and children together discuss how a particular spoken word is written down; words are on labels, photos, take away menus in the home corner)

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=116> Retrieved 13.11.2013

<sup>122</sup> HighScope Educational Research Foundation. (2003). *Preschool program quality assessment: Form A – classroom items* (2nd ed.). Michigan: HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

<sup>123</sup> Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B. (2006). *Assessing quality in the early years: Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-E), Extension (ECECRS-E) Four Curricular Subscales*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

<sup>124</sup> French, G. (2012). *Early literacy and numeracy matters: Enriching literacy and numeracy experiences in early childhood*. Dublin: Barnardos Training and Resource Service.



*Book and literacy areas* (rug and cushions or comfortable seating, a wide range of books including reference books, children are encouraged/directed to books for information, books are included in learning areas outside the book corner)

*Educator reading with the children* (discussion about print and letters as well as content with young children, evidence of one-to-one reading with some children, children explore the books, turn the pages and return to pages, stories are led by the children)

*Sounds in words* (clapping games, jumping with young children, attention to linking sounds to letters)

*Emergent writing/mark-making* (pencils and paper, mark-making (or writing) area, staff and children pass messages to each other; emergent writing is displayed for others to see)

*Talking and listening* (educators observe, wait and listen, educators accept and extend children's verbal contributions in conversation, children reflect on things they did, open-ended questions used to extend the children's language, children are encouraged to turn-take and listen, children are encouraged to ask questions)

### **The criteria and sub-criteria in relation to numeracy are:**

*Counting and the application of counting* (children counting at registration, role play, snack time; one-to-one correspondence encouraged both indoors and outdoors, maths area with number games, posters featuring numbers, number songs, rhymes, the language of maths is observed - 1st, 2nd, 3rd).

*Shape and space* children supported to generalise shape (circle, square, triangle, rectangle) across a variety of contexts, for example, art activities, construction activities, group play arrangements, role play, properties of two or three dimensional shapes, understanding the properties of different shapes (three sides of a triangle), tessellation (fit shapes snugly together) supported.

*Sorting, matching and comparing* (children know why a set of shapes is alike; language of sorting, comparing or matching is used in a variety of contexts and experiences).

*Reading and writing simple numbers* (planned and free-play experiences involving numbers, written numbers linked to a practical purpose in play - pricing items in a shop corner, measuring, '3' written next to three apples, number shapes available).

### **3.4.4 Interviews and written examples of practice**

Interviews were held with the educators and the managers from the four settings who began participation in the Language Enrichment Programme. Prior to the final data gathering visit each manager was requested to give the following question to the interviewees. "In what way has the training impacted on your practice to date? Please give two concrete examples of how your practice has changed (if any changes have taken place)." Participants were asked to submit written testimonials of changes to their practice.

Nineteen interviews were conducted in total. One person chose not to be interviewed and submitted a written response. A total of six written testimonials were offered. The interviews were transcribed and to illustrate the findings. The questions asked began with:

- In what way has the Language Enrichment Programme training impacted on your practice to date?
- If you were to choose one key area of learning for you as a result of the Language Enrichment Programme training what would that be?
- Can you give at least two concrete examples of how your practice has changed (if any)?

The questions asked in the interviews were more organic and flexible and arose as part of the conversations. The discussions touched on the use of video, the process of the training, any criticisms, and any conflicts with what they know and so on. Responses from parents and educators on evaluation sheets completed after the sessions and those completed as part of the overall project by the project co-ordinator were scrutinised.

### 3.5 The process of the evaluation

The process involved two distinct stages with similar procedures at baseline and follow-up one year later. The rooms chosen:

- Catered for three to four year old children
- Were the areas that the majority of the children would be in who were partaking of the second year of the Initiative and who were included in the national evaluation.<sup>125</sup> Assuming that the evaluation children would be there at follow up this allowed for an attempt to compare like with like and assess the overall quality of the setting consistently
- Had a number of staff undertaking the Language Enrichment Programme

#### Stage 1 Baseline - Part 1 PQA and Literacy and Numeracy Indicator

In May 2012 the evaluator met with the participating groups in advance of the first site visit to explain the process which involved observation. It was explained that the purpose of the observation was to capture a snapshot of practice as it occurred as naturally as possible within each setting. It was hoped that the staff would not feel that they had to 'perform' for evaluation visits. However, it was acknowledged that having an observer present may impact on practice. At baseline Part 1:

- A Programme Quality Assessment was conducted by the evaluator in the four settings
- Three managers and one assistant manager were interviewed
- A Literacy and Numeracy Indicator record was completed
- A photographic record of the environment was captured.

#### Stage 1 Baseline - Part 2 Teacher Interaction and Language Scale

Film of the interactions between the educators who were participating in the Programme and children was recorded by the Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) conducting the Programme as part of the Programme. At baseline Part 2:

- The evaluator established inter-rater reliability with the SLT who conducted the Programme to ensure accurate use of 'The Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale. Both individuals rated the same film using the instrument and compared scores. Whilst the SLT used the videos as a teaching tool, the evaluator used them as evidence of practice.
- Films recorded by the SLT after the first day's training on *Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood Settings* - Training A were observed and scored using the Hanen Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale (see 3.4 Methods used for more detail).

#### Stage 2 Follow up - Part 1 PQA and Literacy and Numeracy Indicator

In June 2013 the follow-up evaluation was conducted in the same rooms for three of the settings. However, in one setting the PQA was conducted in two different rooms as the setting had moved premises. At follow up Part 1:

- A Programme Quality Assessment was conducted by the evaluator in the four settings
- The four managers were interviewed
- A literacy and numeracy indicator was completed
- Exit interviewing of the 19 educators who participated in the Language Enrichment Programme was conducted to glean their insights into changes of their practice arising from the Programme and some written examples of changes to practice were received.

<sup>125</sup> McKeown, K., Haase, T., & Pratschke, J. (2014). *Child outcomes in the early years: A study of child outcomes in 2012/13 Free Pre-School Year. Final Report on Evaluation of NEYAI and Sólta Programmes*. Dublin: Pobal.

## Stage 2 Follow up - Part 2 Teacher Interaction and Language Scale

There were three days Training provided by the SLT followed by practice and video-stimulated reflective dialogues between the educators and the SLT. The final day's training focussed on *Fostering Peer Interaction in Early Childhood Settings – Training C*, which meant that the educator's role was to encourage children to interact with each other and for the educators to withdraw from interacting with children themselves. For that reason it was decided to focus on the second day's training. At follow up Part 2:

- Films recorded by the SLT after the second day's training on *Let Language Lead the Way to Literacy – Training B* based on story reading between the same selected individual participants and children were observed and scored using the Hanen Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale (see 3.4 Methods used for more detail).
- A report of the findings was compiled.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

The research protocols of the overall evaluation of the NEYAI were adhered to. The evaluator has a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the evaluation. Participants' rights were respected; the settings', staff's and children's confidentiality was assured. The data was anonymised and stored securely.

The research protocol in relation to the films involved writing to settings to communicate that the films are for evaluation purposes only and will be looked at purely to score the Hanen Programme 'Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale'. They should be viewed only by the Speech and Language Therapist conducting the Programme, Dr Kieran McKeown (national evaluator of the NEYAI or one of his colleagues) and the evaluator. In the (unlikely) event that there may be a value in using them outside of the evaluation for educational purposes only, they will not be shown to anyone without parental/children's permission. In that event the evaluator would return to the settings and ask for said permission. Otherwise the films will be deleted permanently within two years of the evaluation completion.

### 3.7 Limitations of the evaluation

The limitations of this evaluation are considered with the attempts to offset those limitations. The limitations are: the impact of the evaluator on the interactions, the small-scale nature of the evaluation and the lack of data on changes in child outcomes as a result of the programme, the lack of generalisability of the findings, observer/evaluator bias and the challenge to separate the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme from other interventions.

#### 3.7.1 The impact of the evaluator on the interactions

It is a challenge for researchers to achieve the aim of examining situations as they naturally occur, without creating an effect due to their presence.<sup>126</sup> Undoubtedly, the presence of an observer/evaluator impacted on the settings and could potentially even have distorted the interactions studied. This raises methodological and further ethical concerns. As far as possible, the difficulties that the evaluator's presence could make were acknowledged and the educators were encouraged to try and engage in their typical learning experiences and to interact as normally as they could. The same protocol was conducted every day. The evaluator always arrived ahead of the children. The researcher aimed to keep movement to a minimum. It was crucially important that all participants were treated with respect and consideration. The researcher tried to remain as discrete and unobtrusive as possible. In addition videos taken by the SLT were assessed. The evaluator did not have to impose taking extra videos on the staff. The potential impact of the presence of the evaluator exists in both the pre and post training observations. It is the difference in practice that is being measured and for that reason the influence can be ameliorated.

#### 3.7.2 The small-scale nature of the evaluation and lack of child outcomes data

This is a limited, small-scale study based on eight days observation and interviews with participants of the programme. It focusses on a small number of educators in the four settings. Legitimate doubts may be raised as to how far the findings from one or a few cases are generalisable to others.<sup>127</sup> The findings in this evaluation are mainly generalisable to the specific settings, the participants and the Ballyfermot Language

<sup>126</sup> Denscombe, M. (2007). *The good research guide for small-scale research projects* (3rd ed.). England: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>127</sup> Stark, S. & Torrance, H. (2004). Case study. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.), *Research methods in the social sciences* (pp. 33-40). London: Sage Publications.

Enrichment Programme; they cannot be universally generalisable. However, in this evaluation, although each educator and indeed each setting was unique, they were also singular examples of the broad range of educators in community and statutory education and care settings.

Another limitation could be seen as the lack of data on changes in child outcomes as a result of the programme. However, this evaluation focuses on the process of delivery of the intervention and the impact on the educators. Capturing changes in child outcomes is the prime purpose and focus of the national evaluation; the data on changes in child outcomes may be accessed in that report.<sup>128</sup>

### 3.7.3 Observer/evaluator bias

The most significant limitation was that of observer bias in the undertaking of the observations. It is hoped that observer bias is offset by the use of three observation instruments, the establishment of inter-rater reliability with the SLT, the digital audio-recording of the interviews and the transcription of the interview content resulting in a clear audit trail.

## Summary

There are four early childhood settings included in this evaluation. These settings were the first to participate in the Language Enrichment Programme. Three of the four participating settings completed the training at the time of final data collection. Therefore some of the evaluation findings refer to those three settings. The evaluation addresses two research questions.

1. What is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the educator's interactions?
2. What is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the setting?

The methods used to answer the two research questions above involved:

- Analysis of 36 films of the 18 educators' interactions using the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale. The films were taken by the SLT at the beginning and at the end of the Language Enrichment Programme in the three settings who had completed the training at that time
- Direct observations of the four settings and analysis using the Programme Quality Assessment and a Literacy and Numeracy Indicator Scheme
- Interviews with 19 participating educators and managers of the settings
- Coding and analysis of those interviews and six written testimonies of changes to practice as result of participating in the Programme

Other evaluation actions involved:

- Scrutinising responses from parents and educators on evaluation sheets completed immediately after the sessions and those completed as part of the overall project.
- Writing a final evaluation reporting on any change in practice

It should be noted that parents were not included in this evaluation. However, the internal evaluation sheets completed by the parents and educators and documented by the co-ordinator of the project are detailed in full in the Appendices.

The study conforms to the research protocols of the overall evaluation of the NEYAI. Participants' rights were respected; the settings', staff's and children's confidentiality was assured. The data was anonymised and stored securely. The evaluator's presence inevitably impacted on the interactions, this was offset by using videos taken by the speech and language therapist. This is a small-scale study therefore the findings are not generalisable but specific to the settings involved; however although each educator and setting was unique they were all singular examples of early childhood settings in the statutory and community sector.

The next two chapters present and discuss the findings in relation to the impact of the Programme on the educators' interactions and the setting.

<sup>128</sup> McKeown, K., Haase, T., & Pratschke, J. (2014). *Child outcomes in the early years: A study of child outcomes in 2012/13 Free Pre-School Year. Final Report on Evaluation of NEYAI and Sólta Programmes*. Dublin: Pobal.





## Chapter 4

# Impact of Language Enrichment Programme on Educators' Interactions

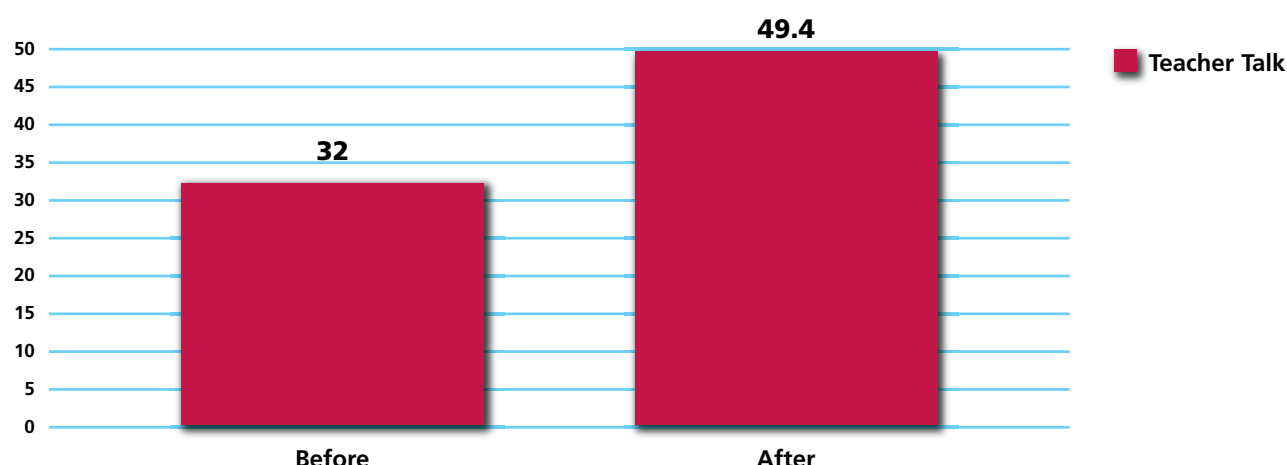
## 4. Impact of Language Enrichment Programme on Educators' Interactions

This chapter focus on the findings in relation to the evaluation research question: what is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the educators' interactions? The data is drawn and presented from the results obtained from observing videos taken by the Speech and Language Therapist and assessed by the evaluator using the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale (see 3.4.1 for detail of the items rated), the responses acquired through the interviews and written testimonials of changes to practice from the educators. The potential for extended purposive conversations between the educators and children as a result of the Programme is then explored. Possible hypotheses are suggested as to why the Programme was a success. Finally a summary of the chapter is offered.

### 4.1 Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale

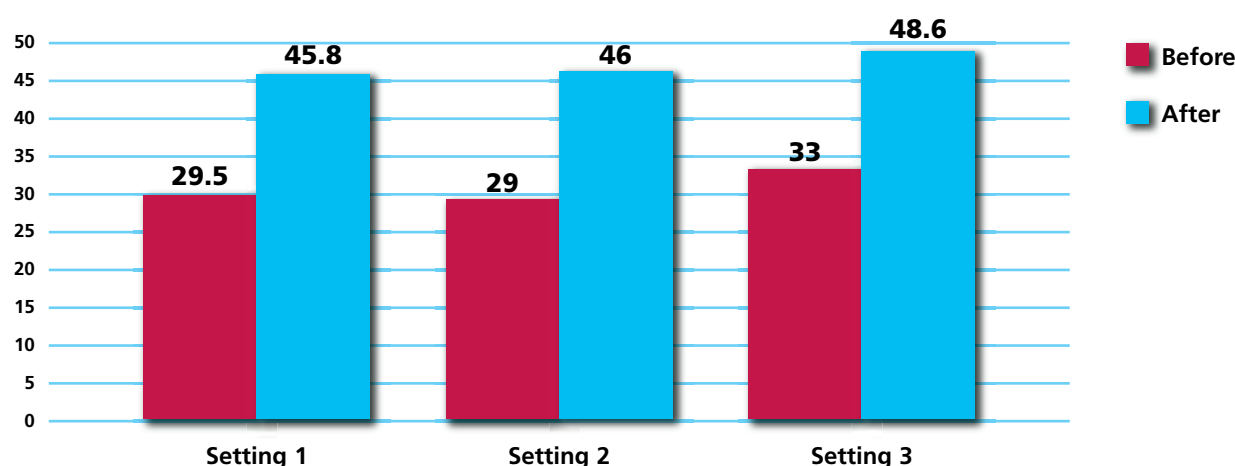
As discussed the instrument employed here (see 3.4.1 *Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale*) is designed to evaluate educator's interactions prior to and following participation in a programme. Only three of the settings' results are presented here as in one setting baseline films were assessed but the educators either left or were not in a position to continue the training at that point. In this setting there were no follow up videos to assess at the time. However, the educators in the setting did contribute to the interviews and have returned to complete the training. The following Table 1 gives the overall picture of the impact of the Programme representing the totals of the ratings of the before and after Programme videos for the three settings who completed the Teacher Talk training.

**Table 1 Overall Impact Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale Results**



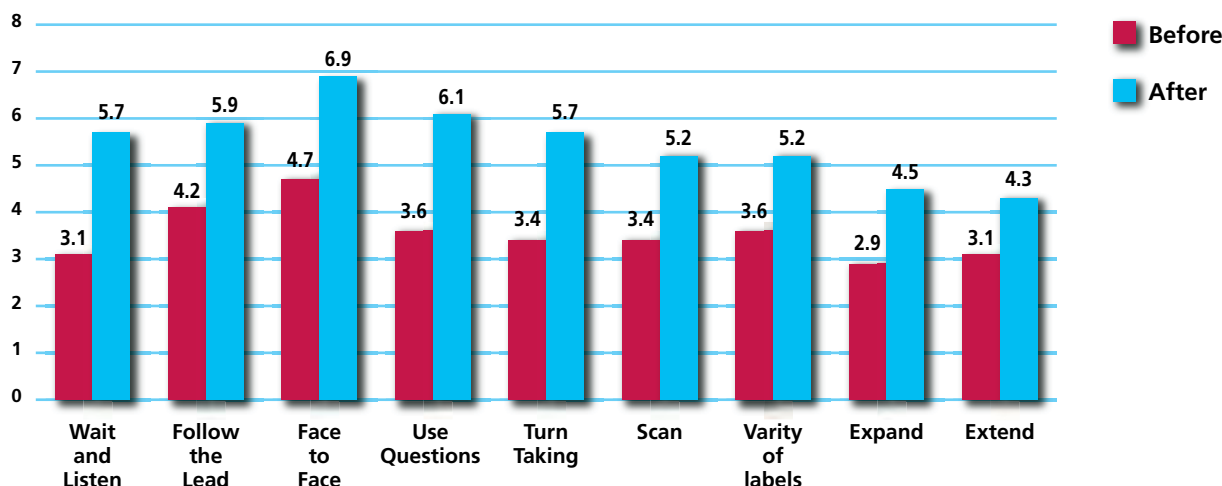
It is clear that there has been a positive impact of the Language Enrichment Programme in relation to the educators' interactions as a result of participating in the Teacher Talk training. Table 2 provides the breakdown of those overall results setting by setting.

**Table 2 Impact Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale Results for each Setting**



It is clear that across all settings a similar level of improvement was made. Setting 3 started at a higher base and subsequently made higher gains but achieved the same level of improvement as the other two settings. This suggests that the Teacher Talk training impacted positively and evenly across the settings. Table 3 gives the overall picture of the impact of the Programme in relation to the individual dimensions of the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale.

**Table 3 Impact Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale Results for each Dimension**



Ratings of one to three indicates a programme goal; a rating of four indicates fine tuning and a programme goal, ratings of five to seven indicates that the educator's use of a strategy achieves expectations. The dimensions of 'imitate' and 'join in and play' are not included here as they relate to younger, preverbal children.

The findings reveal that the impact of the Programme on the participants' interactions as measured by the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale has been significant over all the items scored, with highest change score at 2.6 (wait and listen) and the lowest change score at 1.2 (extend) in a range of five. The highest gains related to the 'observe, wait and listen' (OWL) approach and using a variety of questions to encourage conversations, followed by turn-taking (inviting the child to take a turn, waiting for a response) and being face-to-face (adjusting physical level) in equal measure. A positive impact was also revealed in 'scan' children (ensuring each child participates in small groups) and following children's lead in conversation (responding to children's initiations, avoiding directions and vague acknowledgments). This picture is corroborated by the educators through the interviews (see 4.2 below).

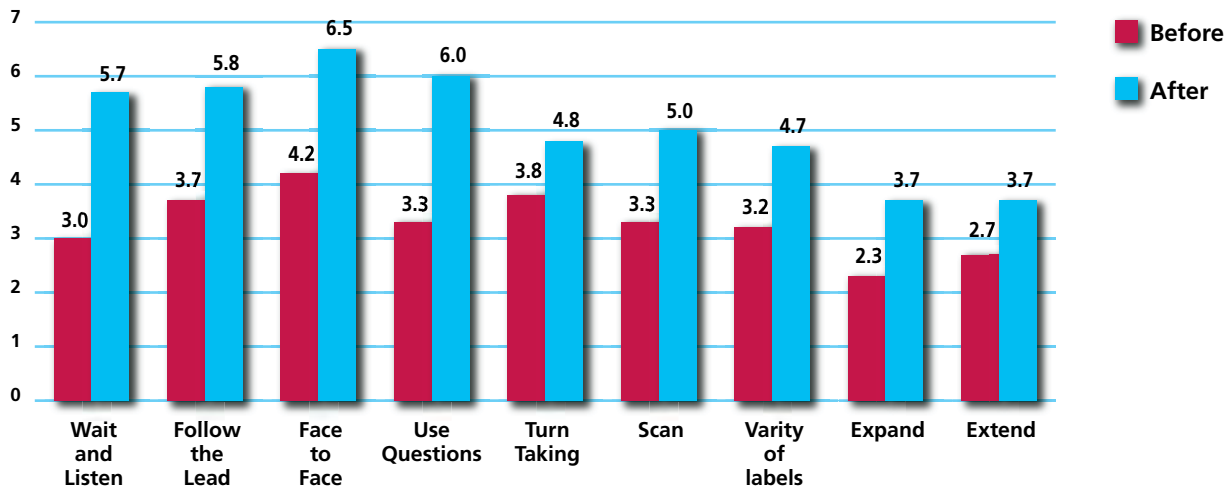
While positive gains were made (1.6 in relation to 'expand' and 1.2 in relation to 'extend') these signified the least gains made overall. 'Expand' refers to expanding on what a child is saying and 'extend' is achieved by modelling decontextualized language. This picture is not surprising. As discussed in 2.2.2 *Extended purposive conversations* the ability to engage in extended purposive conversations with children takes a high degree of knowledge, skill and experience.<sup>129, 130</sup> See also 4.3 *Extended purposive conversations* for further discussion.

<sup>129</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Research Report No. 356. London: Department for Education and Skills.

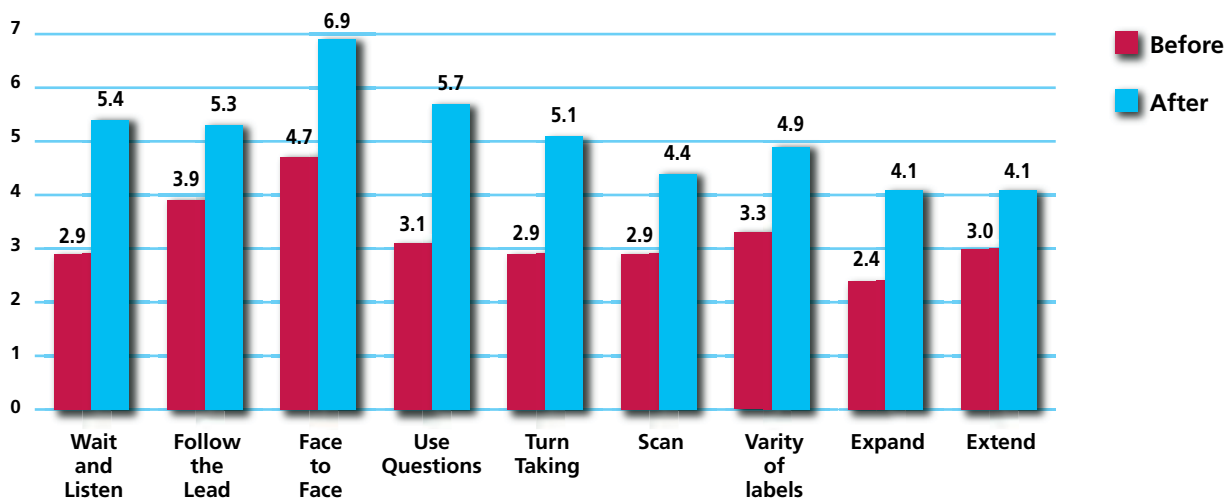
<sup>130</sup> French, G. (2011). *Towards extended purposive conversations*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin.

The following 3 tables give a breakdown of the results for each dimension, setting by setting.

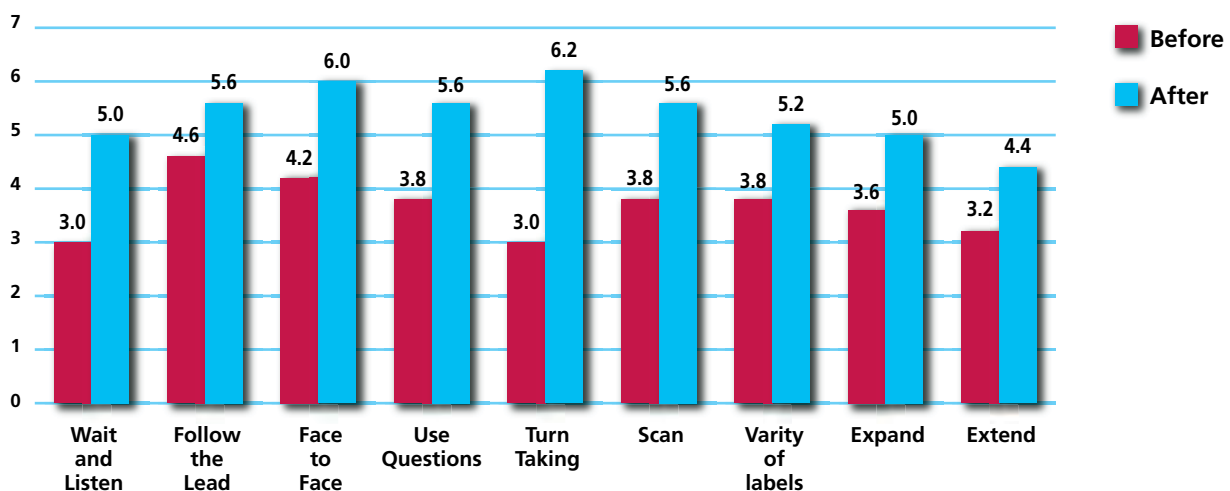
**Table 4 Setting 1 Summary All Dimensions of the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale**



**Table 5 Setting 2 Summary All Dimensions of the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale**



**Table 6 Setting 3 Summary All Dimensions of the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale**





As discussed in chapter 2, we know that the acquisition of a first language is the most complex skill ever learnt; and this task needs to be virtually complete by the time a child reaches school age.<sup>131</sup> Therefore a focus on children's language development is essential, in early childhood settings (and homes) particularly in the context of offsetting educational inequality. Language development is supported by high quality adult-child interactions. It is clear that the quality of the educator's interactions in this study have improved. We know through research that the quality of interactions between educators and children are directly associated with better learning outcomes for children.<sup>132</sup> The findings in this study have revealed that Programmes such as the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme, specifically Teacher Talk training, can have positive impacts on educators' interactions. The next section corroborates these findings through the interviews and written examples of practice.

## 4.2 Impacts on interactions ascertained through interview and written examples

Arising from the interviews a number of common themes emerged which can be clustered (see *Appendix 4 Common themes*). This section presents the opinions and thoughts of the educators on the impact of the Programme on their interactions in their own words. Some of the more powerful quotes are presented in text boxes, extracts from testimonials are presented in blue font, and all direct quotes are presented in italic font.

In relation to the impact of the Programme on educators' interactions the themes that emerged from the interviews and written examples are: "let them talk" - observe, wait and listen, changes to story time and turn-taking.

### 4.2.1 "Let them talk" – observe, wait and listen

The first and universally reported change in practice was providing space, time and opportunity for children to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and language, succinctly described as "let them talk" by one respondent. This finding gives rise to the title of the evaluation. It was found that the idea of standing back and allowing children to express themselves through play was in turn highly influenced by the process of learning to Observe, Wait and Listen. *The OWL, observe, wait and listen has been reinforced. Our motto now is OWL.*

*The biggest impact was about observing the children and waiting for the children to make the first move, because we normally ask them the question first. With the Observe Wait and Listen that worked really very well, waiting for the children to talk to you first, instead of you asking them, 'do you want this, do you want that'?*

*Another thing I picked up on was not interrupting their play... It was after the training that I found out, wait, observe them on one side, see what they're doing, that's how you can get all the language they have, it comes out when they are talking to each other.*

*I found the course really helped me, especially working with the group one to two and a half years of age. The course encouraged me to take a step back from constantly directing and leading the group and instead following the children's lead more. Initially I found this a little difficult, but once I did, I noticed a difference in some of the children. Children were obviously more interested and enthused about tasks, thus language started to develop.*

*I have personally changed. As in waiting for the children to respond to something rather than me expecting an immediate answer... I've actually got a lot more out of them when I wait for them to answer. That falls into other things like letting them do things for themselves; they learn through trial and error. It is nice to see them so independent. Opened my eyes to what they can do if I wait a bit longer. Sit, listen and watch.*

*I was desperate for asking the children loads of questions, I learned to observe, wait and listen, instead of me doing all the talking.*

<sup>131</sup> Crystal, D. (1987). *Cambridge encyclopaedia of language*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>132</sup> McKeown, K., Haase, T., & Pratschke, J. (2014). *Child outcomes in the early years: A study of child outcomes in 2012/13 Free Pre-School Year. Final Report on Evaluation of NEYAI and Sólta Programmes*. Dublin: Pobal.

One of the managers reported that the practice has changed. *Staff are giving feedback that they are using the OWL a lot more. They are not jumping in to make suggestions or to prompt them...particularly with those children who have issues in relation to speech... where it takes them a while to get out what they are trying to saying.*

*In relation to OWL at the start... it took us ages to hold ourselves back and wait for them and now we are letting them...we are able to stay for longer to observe them and if they need the support we will move in. We don't bombard them with the questions now.*

*I'm more aware of how I speak to children and giving them more time, observing them, waiting and listening...*

*Well, the OWL technique, I'm still having to pause and try and think about it, it's just a natural reaction to ask questions and to overcompensate and over talk, so I'm still working on that. But I feel like I'm not asking as much questions, and I'm waiting for them to initiate some kind of communication or kind of language or anything first. I'm changing my room layout as well... (to remove) distractions.*

One educator told of a boy who had developed a stammer. Now we all as a group (educator and children) give him the time to say what he wants to say. They (the children) are modelling me...they see I'm just sitting, waiting for him to finish; they sit and they wait and now we do that with everybody.

*Looking back at the videos and thinking about my practice...my practice has changed by letting them talk...you have to sit back and say to yourself - right - zip it. For example I was watching a colleague today, and she was saying, 'Do we need umbrellas today?' 'She let them give the feedback, instead of me saying, 'No, we don't need umbrellas today, it's sunny' - Have that kind of interaction with the children. That 'children should be seen and not heard' is just ridiculous, pathetic.*

*In general I think the children have become so much more independent, but especially in their language. Before maybe everything was said for them, and that has changed completely.*

*And I was doing so much talking and asking him questions and I wasn't really giving him the language, but now ... he's really just turned around. He's loads of confidence, he's nearly a sentence user, you could have a conversation with him - he's just brilliant.*

Supporting children to use words to build up sentences, using sentences to build up conversations, articulating their ideas and intentions may significantly impact positively on their life chances.<sup>133</sup>

*Our planning (with children) has completely changed- we call it a meeting now...it's really brainstorming... They have lots of plans and ideas – they are a very vocal group.*

The following statement suggests the impact of the Observe, Wait and Listen approach to encouraging children's language.

*Sometimes when I'm in the room...I can hear myself and have to say to myself there's too much of you talking. So I stop and listen and watch and slowly you see the difference. Once you realise it yourself you can hear the difference in the room.*

Children learn as social beings through interactions, in the context of reciprocal interpersonal relationships. A defining feature of a supportive environment is a responsible and responsive adult.<sup>134</sup> Consistent with the

**Everyone has changed the way they do things now in the work setting. It is all for the better. We are giving the children a lot more opportunity to use their language. They are also learning from each other because they are all talking a lot more and getting the chance to do that. I would have been 'now stay and listen; you've got to be quiet'. But not any more...**

**If they're initiating conversation - go with it.**

<sup>133</sup> Edwards, J. R. (1989). *Language and disadvantage: Studies in disorders of communication*. (2nd ed.) London: Whurr.

<sup>134</sup> Bowman, B., Donovan, S. & Burns, S., eds., (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers*. Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

literature, a key finding in this evaluation was that the educators in the settings engaged in interactions in which they practiced linguistic responsiveness. This is one of the premises of the Teacher Talk training.<sup>135</sup> Responsive language input that builds on the child's focus or topic is more easily processed by the child and therefore the child redirects more cognitive resources to learn language.

As discussed in 2.2.4 *Interaction strategies*, linguistic progress is attributable to responsive sensitivity and acceptance of what young children say with non-directive interaction from the adult and the effort with which adults intentionally aim to understand children's meaning and expand and extend it.<sup>136</sup> The participants in this evaluation appeared to have developed sensitivity to the children's current state, have a desire to interpret their meaning, and want children to participate in the interaction. In other words these educators show evidence of active listening.

We know that closed-ended questions do not contribute to extending children's thinking in conversations.<sup>137</sup> These educators have reported a change to their use of questions. Participants spoke of using a variety of questions to encourage conversations including open-ended questions, followed by turn-taking (inviting the child to take a turn, waiting for a response) and being face-to-face (adjusting physical level) as being impacts of the Programme on their interactions. These positive findings augur well for the early childhood practice that is happening in these settings.

#### 4.2.2 Changes to story-time

Story time has changed, reflected within the sub themes of the importance of positioning children, not correcting children's language or perspective, relinquishing conversational control in story reading, creating an appropriate environment for dialogic reading, extending vocabulary, spending more time reading a story.

*We will never approach story telling in the same way.*

##### The importance of positioning children

*...the idea of the face to face (with babies) which was in the training is really important. You think you're doing that, but then, you've a baby sitting on your knee, and the baby is facing away from you, and the book is in front of you both...but I couldn't see what actually was drawing the baby's attention. So once I changed that and sat in front of the baby it made sharing the book different, because I could follow what they were actually looking at, rather than what drew my attention, and leading them.*

*The training changed the way I interact with the children when reading a story. I always put the reluctant child face to face with me and try my best to get them involved more with lots of eye contact and open-ended questions. I use the owl technique and I find it works.*

*How to draw in some children - where to locate children (was a key learning point) - the quiet ones need to be opposite you... The chatterboxes don't need to be right in front of you; they will get your attention anyway.*

*Here is a visible application of ideas into practice. Before the training the children could sit where they want. Tricia (the Speech and Language Therapist) was saying put the children that can talk to the end and the ones that don't talk put them in the middle. Now I put the quiet ones in the centre and it works! Because they are talking more - through the video I can really see where she was coming from. I try that now and - she was right - the talker in the centre was stopping the others.*

##### Not correcting children's language or ideas

Not correcting what children have identified in pictures is now a feature of practice (and is discussed further in 4.3 *Extended purposive conversations*). For example, if it is actually a rat it's OK if he calls it a mouse. So we just let them make up the story themselves, and let them interpret it the way they understand at that level.

<sup>135</sup> The Hanen Centre (Undated). *Research summary: Learning Language and Loving It-The Hanen Program for early childhood educators/teachers*. Toronto: The Hanen Centre, p.2. Available at [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)

<sup>136</sup> Wells. G. (1985). *Language, learning and education*. Berkshire: NFER-Nelson.

<sup>137</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Manni, L. (2008). 'Would you like to tidy up now?' An analysis of adult questioning in the English Foundation Stage. *Early Years*, 28(1), 5-22.

*Now what I do is just let them flip through the books and try and say what they understand from the pictures they're looking at.*

*For a child with poor speech the technique of reflecting back (rather than correcting speech) has really helped...back in the day I might have corrected a child now I'd say "So you were playing in the water area" rather than saying "Do you mean to say water? Say water".*

***I now ...let the children input a lot more... whereas before I would have said be quiet and listen...***

### **Relinquishing conversational control in story reading**

*In relation to story-time, typically I might have panicked if children went off on their own tangent. But now I lay the book down and they flick through the pages, I go along with them, and ask them "will we read the story"? It's taking a bit longer but... What is really interesting is that... they might shift around in the chairs and talk to you a bit but no one actually leaves the circle and wanders off to do something else because they actually are more interested in the story.*

*The reading activity – that has really changed. My focus was on delivering the story ... not on where it went or on children initiating conversation or children projecting to the future... It changed the focus – that was really really good, that piece of training...The children now initiate conversation or they may project where the story might go. We will never approach story telling in the same way.*

*It's about them (children) letting you know what is in the story.*

*One of the managers reported that story time has changed. Staff reported how they like the new approach to story time. It's not them sitting with the book anymore. It's very casual, it's about sharing and exploring the book – it is not about being rigid telling the story anymore. And by doing this children are beginning to notice other things going on in the pictures. For example ...things under the bed in one instance... they are commenting on the detail of the pictures. Story time has been the biggest change. The setting is going to the local library (for the first time) ...and are going to create a story bag to tell a story... that could be used in the future.*

### **Creating an appropriate environment for dialogic reading**

*How the spaces are physically arranged for story reading has changed.*

*Little tips about putting cushions on the floor, sitting on the floor and lying on the floor, and making it more comfortable for story time, and then putting the book down, and going with it.*

***Giving them the lead at story time – is a big change.***

*The concept of dialogic reading has become embedded.*

*I now look at books differently.*

*I read the story to them and I get the children to read the story to all the class. They use words that are not even in the book. They all wait their turn. The other children get involved and say 'that's not happening' they correct and prompt.*

### **Extending vocabulary**

*I was reading a story about 'holding on tight'. Now would a two-year-old understand what holding on tight is? So she (SLT) gave me a tip to say 'hold on to your cushion, hold on tight, we're going to fall', just to bring it to life a bit.*

*The training makes you more aware of how to introduce more words – helping vocabulary.*

*I learnt a lot from the teacher talk training. I give the children the opportunity to pick the book they want to read, and then I read it to them and ask the children what is happening in the story. It's great hearing their feedback. I give the children the opportunity to take the role of the teacher and let them 'read' the book to the other children in the class. I give every child the opportunity to do this. They ask their friends questions as well at the end, which is great to hear.*



*I explain words now in story reading that they might not understand.*

### **Spending more time reading a story**

*I now take it a bit longer now in reading stories ...*

Since doing the Teacher Talk training, I now look at books differently. I now take my time when reading stories and let the children give their input during story time. I explain a lot of the words now that I realise the children might not know their meaning. Whereas before, at story time, I would insist on the class to be quiet while I read the story and they could only ask questions at the end. Since changing story time the children stay more engaged and are happy to sit, listen and join in in telling stories.

*There's no set time now for a story to be over.*

*Before I started the training, the way ...that you'd read a story to a group of children would be sit them down, to take out a book, make sure they are all quiet ready to listen, start reading, stop them if they are interrupting...finish the story and that would be it...I didn't put much thought into it. I knew that books were important. Now I feel the training has had a huge impact...now I sit down and read a book and we discuss the cover and talk about all aspects of the book. I'll listen to what they say and any questions that they have. There are so many opportunities for them to learn...The time I spend reading a story has gone from 5 minutes to even half an hour depending on the book.*

**Story time – you stop, you take your time. Children won't know what a troll is, you need to stop and ask. And use words like Goldilocks' long curly hair...**

The settings have clearly changed their practices in relation to story time. The importance of creating a common shared experience between adults and children to act as a basis for conversation was addressed in 2.2.4 Interaction strategies.<sup>138</sup> Story reading provides wonderful opportunities to engage in joint involvement which is a pre-requisite for extended purposive conversations to occur between adults and young children (see 4.3 for further discussion).

### **4.2.3 Listening Groups – turn-taking**

When asked what is the impact of the speech and language programme on your practice one educator reported that *I found the Listening Groups useful for...some very challenging children, to get them to sit at the table and stay at the table and do the activities; using the puppets was great and the bubbles game and the good sitting and taking turns...it was pretty good.* When asked to explain the bubble game the educator responded *You blow the bubbles and the children have to wait their turn, you say ready, steady pop. They take their turns and can only pop it when we say pop. It was good for them staying still; some wouldn't have stayed in the chairs at all. They'd wait their turn to pop and that kept them going until the next activity and then they'd sit longer for the next activity.* The children could rely on the fact that they would get a turn.

*Tricia left two boxes of props. When I do the exercise with the children, once the box arrives, they know it's a specific exercise that we're doing, and they know that turn-taking happens, once they sit and they listen they get a turn. They love when Lucy (the puppet doll) comes out of the box. And games where they have a turn – say a marble run. There's only one marble, they take turns putting it down the chimney or whatever. They know when those boxes arrive, that's how they get their turn, by sitting and listening... Something we hadn't been doing was turn taking with the children.*

Not all children are reticent about talking one participant mentioned how a boy in her group loves to talk. However, he speaks without thinking...he'll

**We did the listening groups every second day, but after a couple of months the children got used to it and we stopped using the listening groups because they were able to sit and wait and take turns and listen to each other- using puppets, music, bubble game.**

<sup>138</sup> Tizard, B. & Hughes, M. (2002). *Young children learning*. (2nd ed.). UK: Blackwell Publishing.p.63

*...speak for the sake of speaking sometimes, which is great...but he'd be butting in on other children's conversations. With him I now say 'hold on'. I support turn-taking now. I now find when he does speak what he says makes more sense.*

*I'm finding now that I'm taking the Listening Groups and we are taking turns. That was huge. Waiting, sitting and listening ...I wasn't sure at the start but when I got into it I saw it was working. Some little people don't like taking their turns or waiting. But they sat and waited, they didn't try and snatch. I found it was great – really enjoyed that one.*

Some ideas for turn-taking that could be used in settings include:

*I still use Lucy the puppet. Last week we were doing all about our bodies. One activity that Tricia showed us was using stickers and asking the children to put the sticker on Lucy's head or Lucy's shoulder. They had great fun doing that; they loved it.*

*I also use the 'mystery bag'. The topic was about children going to big school. We put school things in the bag, pencils, and rulers and we passed it around and children pulled things out of the bag and we talked about what it was used for. We can change the items. Turn-taking has improved a lot in the room.*

### 4.3 Extended purposive conversations

A premise of the Hanen programme is that "children benefit from being involved in extended interactions in which they are full and active participants" where they can refine and practice their communication skills, learn the rules of conversation with educators who will model progressively complex language relevant to the child's topic.<sup>139</sup> We know from research that children's exposure to a wide and variable vocabulary predicts subsequent vocabulary growth.<sup>140</sup> From the evidence reported above, this message has clearly been embedded in the practice of the educators. In the context of educational inequality, studies have demonstrated that language competence is positively correlated with success in the educational system.<sup>141,142</sup> An appropriate response to a limited vocabulary is to "broaden a child's linguistic repertoire"<sup>143</sup> while respecting and accepting children's responses.

A focus on not correcting what children say in the context of story time or indeed at any other period of the day is important as this has particular relevance in the context of educational inequality. This study has demonstrated that staff skills for developing children's language were enhanced by this intervention and these skills have been shown in other studies to be associated with improved child outcomes particularly in the domain of language and cognitive skills. These interactions must be respectful of the linguistic experience of the children, with conversations being built and extended on the child's existing vocabulary. Furthermore, it is considered that corrective teaching could be counterproductive. Attempts at correcting what children say about their theories on the story or what colour a page is, or instructing a child directly to pronounce a word in a particular way may foster linguistic insecurity, which is the exact opposite of what is desired, particularly for the self-esteem of very young children.<sup>144</sup> Notwithstanding the possibility of causing psychological distress to young children, there is little evidence that such an approach would work.<sup>145</sup> What is appropriate is for educators to respect the children (and their families), value the diversity of their language use, consistently model appropriate language, whilst organising an atmosphere where children are not made self-conscious about their language use. This perspective militates against the "soft bigotry of low expectations" so inherent within communities experi-

**Children are the conduit; they can create their own learning a lot more than I could... They have all these questions that you wouldn't even think of...**

<sup>139</sup> The Hanen Centre (Undated). *Research summary: Learning Language and Loving It-The Hanen Program for early childhood educators/teachers*. Toronto: The Hanen Centre, p.2. Available at [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)

<sup>140</sup> Hart, B., & Risley, T.R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Baltimore, Maryland: Brookes

<sup>141</sup> Cregan, A. (2008). *From difference to disadvantage: 'Talking Posh' sociolinguistic perspectives on the context of schooling in Ireland*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

<sup>142</sup> Riley, J., Burrell, A. & McCallum, B. (2004). Developing the spoken language skills of reception class children in two multicultural, inner-city primary schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5) October, 657-672.

<sup>143</sup> Edwards, J. R. (1989). *Language and disadvantage: Studies in disorders of communication*. (2nd ed.) London: Whurr.

<sup>144</sup> Edwards, J. R. (1989). *Language and disadvantage: Studies in disorders of communication*. (2nd ed.) London: Whurr.

<sup>145</sup> Op cite

encing inequality.<sup>146</sup> The expectations are that children are competent, able and with time (and support for children who need speech and language therapy) they will acquire accurate language and concepts (such as colour and shapes and so on). The enhanced expectations of the educator of children's abilities are demonstrated in the quote above.

Engaging in extended purposive conversations takes a high degree of knowledge, skill and experience. Educators are required to be proactive and use a number of devices to create a common knowledge between educators and children, thereby creating rich opportunities to extend children's language and thinking. In this evaluation many of the underpinning concepts of extended purposive conversations were evident. It appears that many of the educators were on the same wavelength as the children (intersubjectivity); through dialogic story reading joint involvement was established; some educators appeared to be concerned with supporting children to understand words (meaning making). It appears that some of the educators are willing to collaborate and co-construct learning and indeed have changed their perspective on children's abilities. This shift in attitudes towards children as confident and competent, which is at the centre of Aistear and therefore early childhood practice, is important.

This suggests that a pedagogy of conversation is emerging in the settings. As discussed in 2.2.3 such pedagogy utilises the power of conversation to engage children's learning and thinking and secure their understanding. An ideal conversation is one where adults engage in reciprocity and treat children as equal conversational partners. Such adult conversational partners believe that children have worthwhile things to say, and support a child's "attempts to communicate and extend his or her contributions".<sup>147</sup>

The educators will need more practice to bed down these ideas and keep a focus on joining in and playing with children as well as at story time to build on a child's focus of interest without dominating and so extend their conversations thus developing a pedagogy of conversation.

As encouraged by the Hanen Programme interaction-promoting strategies encourage extended, balanced conversations between educators and children in both one-to-one and small group interactions. This involves listening carefully to the children, tailoring responses to their interests and not dominating the conversation. As discussed in 2.2.3 *Underpinning Concepts of Extended Purposive Conversations* encouraging children to engage in conversations and develop language involves adults becoming aware of children's knowledge and understanding and engaging with that; developing excellent dialogue skills, interest and enthusiasm to discover more about the child's topic of interest. Some of these strategies were in evidence in the evaluation.

It was noted (see 1.3.2 *Programme contents*) that language-modelling strategies build children's receptive and expressive language skills, as well as their emergent literacy knowledge by providing models of more advanced oral language – strategies include using nouns, verbs, adjectives and include unfamiliar words; expanding on what children say and extend the topic by modelling decontextualized language. "This means going beyond concrete experience to imagine situations not present, which requires children to engage in abstract thought and to share those thoughts in language with an audience who may not necessarily share the same temporal and spatial context."<sup>148</sup> An example would be children telling stories or talking about an imaginary dog. "Imaginative play supports the early emergence of decontextualised language as it arises from children's own desire to communicate and express meaning to peers."<sup>149</sup> The evidence above demonstrates the educators' willingness to let go unhelpful strategies of expecting children to be quiet. Instead they are encouraging children to give their input, which is essential to language development in children.

"Exposure to decontextualised language in the context of everyday interactions is essential to children's language and literacy outcomes." Children need engagement in extended discourse where they are obliged to use language in abstract and complex ways in contexts that are removed from the here and now, such as in dialogic reading. Extended purposive conversations between educators and children were observed through the videos of story reading and are beginning to be embedded in the settings in that context. Engaging in these conversations throughout the day will support children's language development (and thinking) even further. Educators need to be able to extend and expand on any topic at hand, think about vocabulary they are using and strategies to help them with that.

<sup>146</sup> Cuban, L. (2006). *US School Reform and Classroom Practice: 1980s-2005*, from notes taken at an International Invitational Symposium Figuring and Reconfiguring Research, Policy & Practice: New Directions for Educational Change? Held in St Patrick's College, Dublin City University, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, from July 5th to 8th 2006.

<sup>147</sup> Op cite, p. 7

<sup>148</sup> French, G. (2013). *Early speech and language matters: Enriching the communication environment and language development in early childhood*. Dublin: Barnardos Training and Resource Service, p.12

<sup>149</sup> Op cite, p.147

## 4.4 Process of delivery

It is clear from what has been portrayed in the findings that this was a successful programme. This section attempts to tease out the ingredients, as revealed through the interviews that made the Language Enrichment Programme, in particular the Teacher Talk training, so successful. They include engagement of the managers and the readiness and dispositions of staff, the use of video and the process of video feedback, the process of self-evaluation and the particular skills of the SLT, her strengths-based focus and her expertise to deal with issues and model professional practice onsite. The model of delivery appeared to be successful and is discussed. Finally some very brief words of criticism about the Programme delivery are offered.

### 4.4.1 Engagement of the managers and readiness of staff

The four managers of the settings were interviewed as part of the cohort. Three of the four had attended the training themselves. One manager revealed that the SLT had *advised that I keep involved and I have been doing that*.

It was reported by two of the managers that it was a challenge for themselves to undertake the videos and the application of training to practice. As a manager you can *lose your skills* when not working directly with the children on a daily basis. This was off-set by the strengths based focus that the SLT took. All four unanimously agreed the training has had a significant and positive impact on the practice.

*There has been huge improvements, we still have a lot to do, but I think that will only come if we're able to really reflect on what we're doing and how we're using these approaches.*

*As manager bringing in training is key to keeping peoples' skills updated and keeping information relevant. You can have training and then it gets forgotten about if you are not applying it. We have to keep our practice at a standard. I think courses like this help to identify where we are at and where we can go, how to improve the service – I'm pushing for quality all the time.*

One of the advantages of this was expressed by one staff member – *we share information... so we are all on the same page*. Supporting senior leaders to ensure communication supportive practice throughout their early childhood settings is seen as a key feature of successful speech and language programmes.<sup>150</sup>

The readiness of staff for this type of intervention was a key feature of the Programme and may also be a key success factor. That readiness was so palpable and touching in their willingness to acknowledge and unlearn unskilful ways of thinking and working. The evidence of these changes in practice was reported through the interviews (see also 5.3 and 5.4). One person did not feel comfortable with the video and didn't continue with the Teacher Talk Training at that time, she *found it daunting*, but it was due to the circumstances she was in at the time, *there was a lot going on, other training going on*, and she was in position of keeping the room going. She feels *she'd be better able to cope with it now a year later... as I'm more comfortable in the room... She (SLT) was very positive about the feedback she gave; it was just so embarrassing, looking at yourself...*

This is important evidence about the role of staff readiness to participate in an intensive training programme such as this.

### 4.4.2 Use of the videos and process of video-feedback

The onsite aspect of implementation of the ideas from training into practice proved to be challenging but valuable. The use of videos was particularly challenging in the beginning, but ultimately proved to be a powerful learning tool.

*And of course the videos, we all hated doing the videos, the very idea of it.*

*Video is a very powerful tool. It is amazing to watch yourself; a bit cringy at times.*

***The use of video sessions - that kind of micro-teaching is brilliant... I want to bring that in so we could look at our practice and change it if we need it - not used as a tool of... fault finding...but to learn from each other.***

<sup>150</sup> Key principles to consider before using an intervention <https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/schools/what-works/keyprinciples.aspx>. Retrieved 1.11.2013



*I think the video sessions really helped me, and I still refer back to them, even though at the time I used to dread doing them, but looking back it was really where I learnt the most, how to interact with the kids.*

*Everything's happening at one time, when you step away and start to talk about what you can see on the video, that's when it's like, a magic moment, it all comes together. You see where the children are at, you see what you're doing or what you're not doing – you know, I could see from a video of me doing a story with the babies, well, that baby wasn't looking where I was looking, that's where you figured that out.*

*It was horrible... but it was very good, it's good to see yourself and look back at so many things that you do that you are not even conscious and aware of that you do.*

*Videos are a great idea, I didn't like doing it. But, you see what you did and what you could do differently in situations. Need to see yourself – your body language.*

*I enjoyed looking back on the video and bits that I may be going wrong and she praised. I learned more from the video – to see yourself. Both the training and the video work complimented really well.*

*The video gives you a new way – it benefits you. I do things a lot differently now.*

*To be honest, I was dreading the video, but it really is helpful, when you look back at yourself.*

#### 4.4.3 Process of self-evaluation

The process of self-evaluation was worthwhile. The SLT gave an evaluation sheet to the participants for them to assess themselves in relation to their performance on the video (see Appendix 1 Self-rating Scale). This was deemed very useful as there is always room for improvement.

*And with the evaluation as well, there's ten things to ask yourself, and just pick two you'd like to change and improve on. She gives you an evaluation, you mark yourself first, you're excellent, good, satisfactory or whatever. And then you pick two, obviously the two lowest, what you feel yourself that you don't do. You pick two and you work on them, because obviously you can't work on ten. Once you've succeeded you pick another two. We've done one for every session.*

*Evaluating yourself as well – Trish was saying to me to mark myself, and as Trish said, you also have to recognise when you're good at something as well. I found that very valuable. I did listen, I did wait, I did watch.*

***The video...is essential really ...there's so much learning from it. It's very real, when you're watching the video -'really, do I do that?', and it really hits home. But there was a lot of tension and nervousness around the time of the video, and I think if it was used more often, that would fall away, and you'd see yourself in more realistic terms in the videos.***

***"The training has had a big impact on my practice and generally the practice of all the staff. Definitely it is the most fulfilling training I have done ... it was a very positive thing for us to do."***

#### 4.4.4 Skills of the particular Speech and Language Therapist

Respondents reported unprompted and almost unanimously that the training was "really worthwhile doing" or was "really, really good", "I enjoyed the training", "it was excellent". I enjoyed the delivery of the training and learned loads." "The course is going really really well, Tricia (SLT) is very easy to listen to, especially on a Saturday morning. She is very vivacious, lively." "Tricia was excellent, and she made the days really enjoyable." The training "was a very hands-on approach. I like the idea of ...putting us in the position of being a child. Particularly when we were doing the story telling and to give our feedback on what it felt like when the teacher was reading to us. The videos were very worthwhile and Tricia's approach was fantastic." "You are asked to do training you'd think "not more training", but then you got into it. Tricia is lovely...she kind of made it easy." "We've enjoyed doing it and the children are enjoying the sessions as well." "It's great! It has really worked wonders in the centre." "Tricia is brilliant", "Tricia is great for giving advice, you can email her anytime."

This educator pointed more specifically to some of the SLT's skills – her interest and ability with people. *I enjoyed the process. I liked the way it was taught. Sometimes in training I feel a bit nervous, you can be put on the spot. I thought she was very friendly and open and warm. She was very personable, she got to know everyone.*

**Everyone should have Tricia.  
Honestly she was brilliant.**

The SLT also appeared to recognise when participants were struggling and could deal with it empathetically.

*Tricia said to me 'you're finding that hard aren't you? I said 'yeah' because I like to get down and be in with them. When they say (my name) I'm thrilled but I still find standing back hard.*

### **Strengths-based focus of the SLT**

One of the key findings through interview was the strengths-based focus of the SLT.

*... a lot of the time you go into training, we're being told to do another day of sitting around, and I had a little bit of experience of this Hanen programme, so I think the first day I was a bit like, here we go again, I've done this before, I've the posters up on my wall. That was just initially... Tricia was a big part of how it worked, because you didn't feel like you were getting criticism in any way, she acknowledged 'this is what you're doing anyway', but let's just name what it is and put a value on it. And, I think it was putting a value. She put a value on what we were doing and how important it was. It was putting all the pieces together I think.*

Two of the managers reported that the SLT *had great skills in managing a group and delivering information, and she made it so that you could really see how to incorporate it into practice, that she "set up small group discussions that worked really well"*.

*I was a little bit apprehensive when you are going to be videoed... but she always pointed out all our strengths – what we were already doing and how we could change.*

She was clearly able to command the respect of the educators by demonstrating or making suggestions that worked.

*She'd say "I want you to try it this way – lay down on the floor, put the book down on the floor and let them turn the pages. And you know that is the right thing to do but you are afraid of absolute chaos happening in the room... We were talking about the story rather than reading it. I had taken all that on board and we were talking about the pictures. But then someone wanted to go back to the beginning. We ended up talking about the images of other books written by the same author. We talked about that for ages. This felt good... I don't feel under pressure to get to the end of the book... And even to have the time to talk, at the time I was struggling with another little boy, and Tricia just gave me so many little tips to help me with his language, and he came on great as well. She's just a huge resource for anyone to have.*

*It's good so far, it's always worth getting up on a Saturday morning. We go back over (the video-tape). She (SLT) never says your bad points, but will show you what is really positive about it. Then she might say what is 'so and so' doing while you are reading the story? And you'll realise that you hadn't noticed them – someone wasn't paying attention, or were lost in their own world.*

### **Expertise of the Speech and Language Therapist**

The SLT was able to reassure one educator that a child did not present with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). She discussed the concerns with the educator involved and indicated the behaviours that would encourage the SLT to seek a referral to determine the presence or absence of ASD. The identification of a child with ASD or the determination that a child is not ASD is a clinical diagnosis and has to be conducted by an interdisciplinary team. The SLT provided the staff with the appropriate markers that might indicate a referral is warranted and suggested that they monitor the child.

In addition she was able to model the strategies she was advising and make suggestions on the spot. The participants in the training (both parents and educators) were able to see what the SLT suggested works. Furthermore as advocated by one educator:

*I can tell parents that I was at a course and the SLT advised not to correct or pressurise children to repeat words correctly. It's not coming from me...*

#### 4.4.5 Model of delivery

The model of delivery appears to be successful. One days' training was conducted which delivers a theoretical understanding of specific content (the first day concerned different types of communicators and OWL, the second day covered linking language and literacy through story reading, and the third day focussed on peer interaction) with practical examples followed by onsite one-to-one mentoring with video analysis. The SLT supported good practice in the classroom and educational target setting and evaluation as recommended.<sup>151</sup>

The Programme appeared to fulfil the requirements for effective in-service education as discussed in 2.4.3.<sup>152, 153</sup> These requirements first of all include a focus on content knowledge. Second, active participation of educators in the learning process — group sessions include a variety of media and are structured so that learning is facilitated through interactive, experiential activities. These include small group problem-solving, videotape analysis and simulated practice activities, followed by discussion on implications for classroom implementation. Third, the Programme was coherent with other training with two notable exceptions (the use of praise and adult-direction which is discussed in the next chapter). Alignment with national frameworks is advised in any training as is the involvement of others from the same setting so a sustained communication can be continued after the life of the programme. Fourth, there was the collective participation of educators from the same setting, including the managers; as a result it is more likely that systemic change in practice may be promoted over time. Fifth this offered a continuous programme of study, sustained over one year. Opportunities to apply knowledge in simulated and real-life situations — educators practice strategies in simulated activities during both group sessions and everyday classroom activities, the latter being guided by specific plans developed during group sessions. Finally and perhaps most importantly on-site mentoring— each educator was observed, videotaped and provided with on-site mentoring and feedback by the SLT three times over the course of the year-long Programme. By locating opportunities for professional development within an educators' regular work day, connections can be made with classroom practice.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore immediate feedback to educators' on the videotaped interactions from the SLT shortly after being filmed supports application of their learning. The feedback increases educators' awareness of their own and the children's interactive behaviour and the interplay between the two, as well as to facilitate successful implementation of responsive strategies.

#### 4.5.6 Words of criticism

Very few criticisms were made. In perusing the evaluations of the days themselves there were two comments on the coldness of the temperature in the rooms. One other participant reported that the programme could have been delivered *"a few days together and the return visits for videoing could have been closer together"*.

Only one person reported *I don't think it has impacted a terrific deal. I don't think it is anything we weren't doing ourselves initially; maybe it's just making ourselves more conscious of it, and using the words with the children.*

### Summary

The findings and discussion in this chapter centres on the research question: what is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the educators' interactions? The findings revealed that Programme had a significant and positive impact on the quality of the educators interactions as obtained through the Teacher Interaction and Language Rating Scale with the highest gains in relation to the observe, wait and listen approach and the least in relation to expanding and extending children's talk.

The findings revealed through interview and written testimonials that story time has changed, reflected within the sub themes of the importance of positioning children, not correcting children's language or perspective, relinquishing conversational control in story reading, creating an appropriate environment for dialogic reading, extending vocabulary, spending more time reading a story. Providing space, time and opportunity for children to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and language succinctly put as *"let them talk"*

<sup>151</sup> Key principles to consider before using an intervention <https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/schools/what-works/keyprinciples.aspx>. Retrieved 1.11.2013

<sup>152</sup> Bowman, B., Donovan, S. & Burns, S., eds., (2001). *Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers*. Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>153</sup> Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 915-945.

<sup>154</sup> Op cite

by one participant was frequently referenced by the respondents as a significant impact of the Programme on their interactions. This in turn was highly influence by the process of 'observe, wait and listen'. These findings give rise to the title of the evaluation.

The positive changes to story reading and the potential that stories have to engage children in extended purposive conversation were manifested in the evaluation. A pedagogy of conversation is emerging in the settings. With practice and opportunities to reflect further on their interactions, the educators may be in a position to exploit those conversations throughout the day. This is particularly important in the context of educational inequality, in particular exposure to decontextualised language. Educators need to be able to extend and expand on what children are saying.

It is hypothesised that the success of the Programme was due to the engagement of the managers as well as the dispositions and readiness and willingness of staff to change their practice, and the quality of the in-service training and onsite mentoring support. The SLT was particularly skilled; she combined a strengths-based focus with expertise to model the required strategies onsite, to suggest new approaches and encourage practice of those approaches and to pick up on the language issues of the children. The use of the videos and process of self-evaluation and video-feedback also appeared to be particularly useful.

The model of delivery appeared to be successful based on the five indicators of successful in-service training: a focus on content knowledge; opportunities throughout the training for active learning which in turn was dependent on the form of the in-service education (workshop, onsite mentoring); coherence with other learning activities; collective participation of educators from the same school/setting, and the duration of the programme. *It wasn't just something that was in a book, it was something that you were actually using and putting in place.* In conclusion the Language Enrichment Programme positively impacted on the quality of the educators' interactions. The next chapter focusses on the impact of the Programme on the quality of the settings.





## Chapter 5

# Impact of Language Enrichment Programme on the Settings

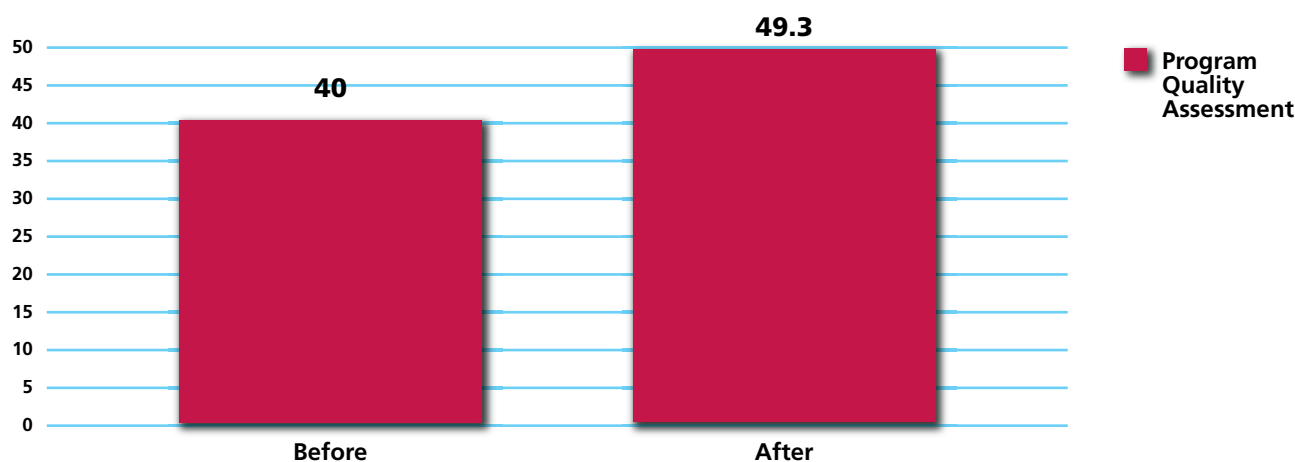
## 5 Impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the Settings

This chapter presents and discusses the findings in relation to the evaluation research question: what is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the setting. The data ranges from the results obtained by conducting a Program Quality Assessment (see 3.4.2 for detail of the items rated), a Literacy and Numeracy Indicator (see 3.4.3 for detail of the items rated) combined with the responses from the interviews and written examples of changes to practice. The impact of the Programme on educator's awareness of speech, language and communication issues is then outlined followed by the potential (but resolvable) conflict between HighScope and the Language Enrichment Programme. Finally a summary of the chapter is provided.

### 5.1 Programme Quality Assessment

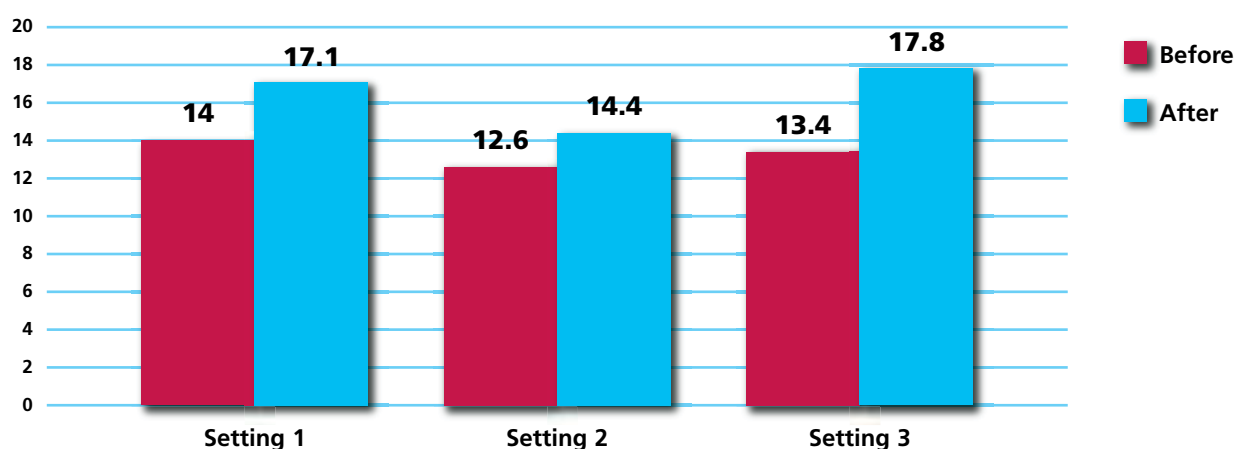
As discussed (see 3.4.2) the Program Quality Assessment instrument is designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programmes and identify staff training needs. The PQA Form A covers 39 dimensions of program quality in four domains: learning environment, daily routine, adult-child interaction, curriculum planning and assessment (see 3.4.2 for more detail on the dimensions). The following Table 7 presents a picture of the total results at baseline and follow-up a year later for the three settings who completed the Language Enrichment Programme at the time of the final data gathering for this evaluation. See *Appendix 5 Detail of Program Quality Assessment Results* for a more detailed breakdown of scores.

**Table 7 Overall Impact Program Quality Assessment Results**



It is clear that there has been a positive impact of the Language Enrichment Programme in relation to the overall quality of the three participating settings. Table 8 provides the breakdown of those overall results setting by setting.

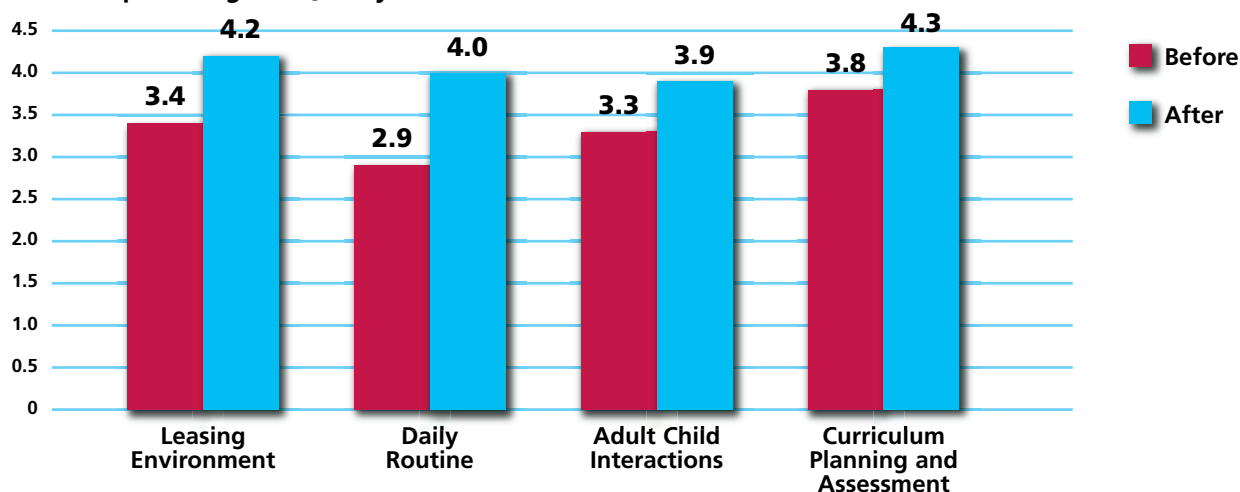
**Table 8 Impact Program Quality Assessment Results for each Setting**



These are reassuring results. We can be reasonably sure the intervention was effective in Settings 1-3 as the results are consistent with the areas of change targeted by the intervention. An overall improvement in quality was ascertained. A higher differential score was achieved by those settings who are implementing HighScope. A lower differential score for setting 2 is related mainly to a higher score in adult-child

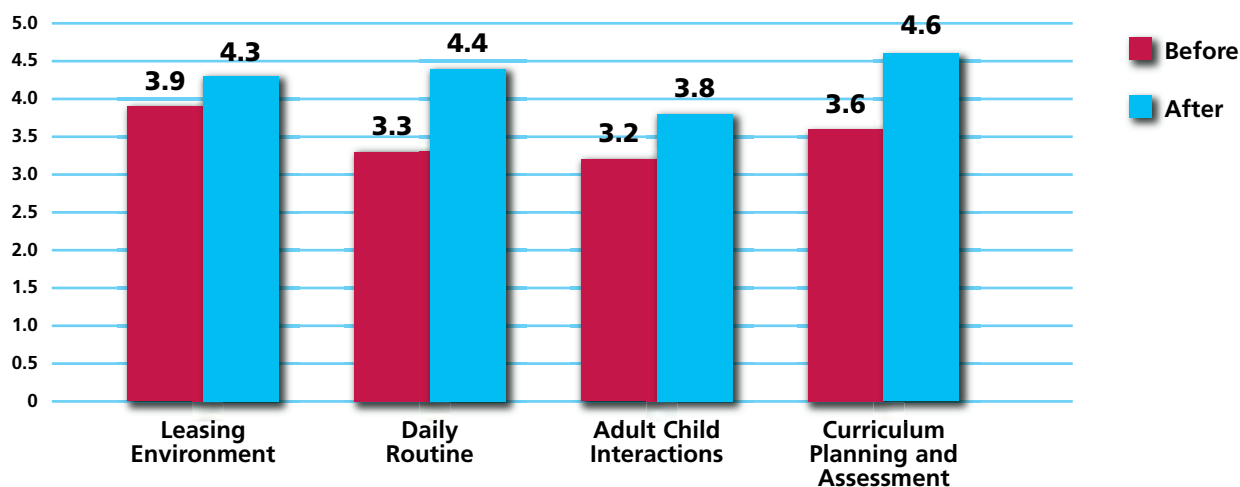
interactions at baseline (see *Appendix 5 Detail of Program Quality Assessment Results*). Table 9 gives the overall picture of the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme in relation to the individual dimensions of the Program Quality Assessment (see *Appendix 5 Detail of Program Quality Assessment Results* for further breakdown of the dimensions).

**Table 9 Impact Program Quality Assessment Results for each Dimension**

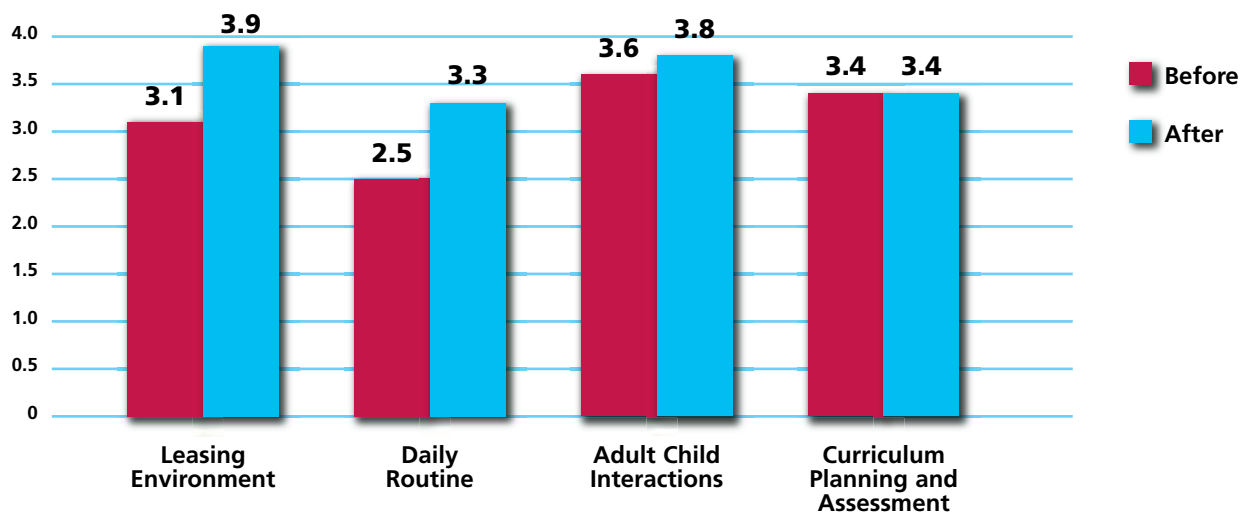


All four of the individual settings' results are presented here, those taken at baseline and follow-up one year later. Setting 4 had not completed the Programme at the time of the follow-up data gathering for the evaluation. See *Appendix 5 Detail of Programme Quality Assessment Results* for greater detail.

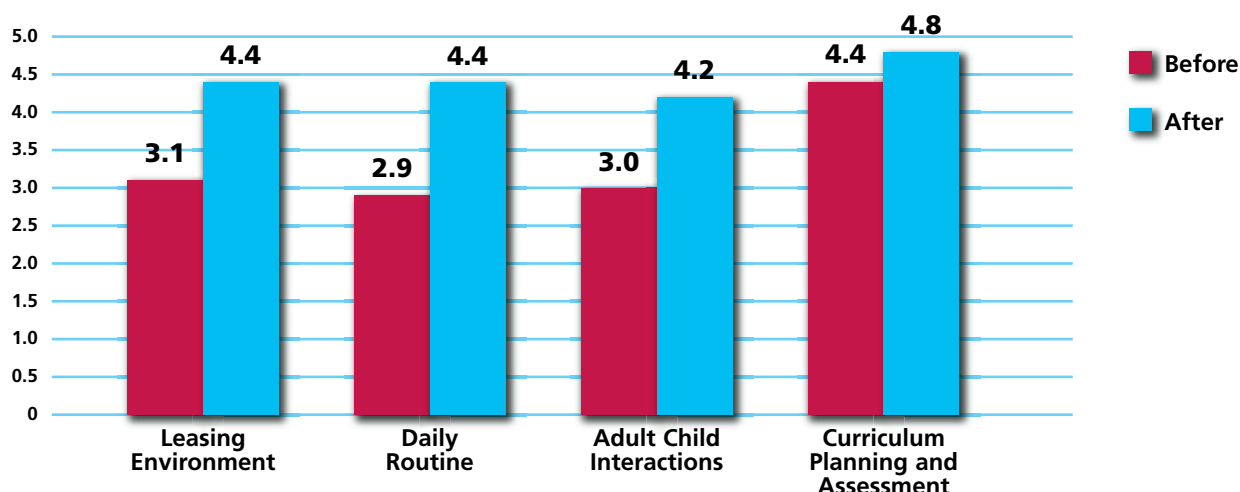
**Table 10 Setting 1 Programme Quality Assessment Results**



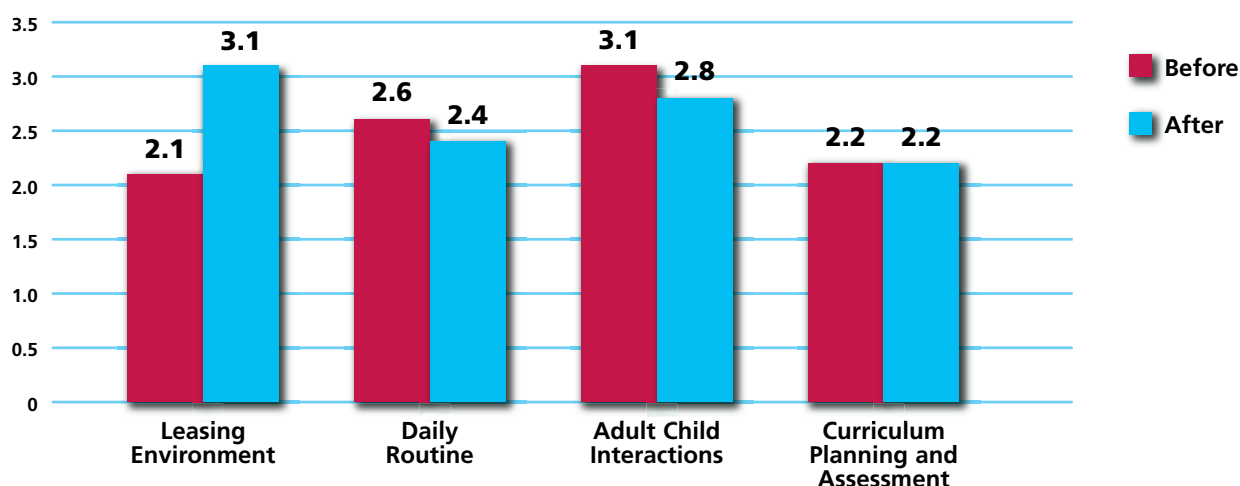
**Table 11 Setting 2 Programme Quality Assessment Results**



**Table 12 Setting 3 Programme Quality Assessment Results**



**Table 13 Setting 4 Programme Quality Assessment Results**



As can be seen from the results above with the exception of Setting 4 the overall quality of the first three settings has improved over the year particularly in relation to the learning environment, the daily routine and the adult child interactions. The curriculum planning and assessment remained the same in Setting 2 and improved in the two other settings that had engaged in the Programme. However it should be acknowledged that a score of over 3 is considered a good score; the lowest score being zero and the highest score being five.

The reduced result for the daily routine in relation to Setting 4 was because the children did not go outdoors on the morning of the visit. In relation to interactions the reduced result was due to educator-directed learning where children were directed to conform to the educator's ideas in one instance (for example where the pig should be – the farm rather than the zoo). This is as opposed to educator – initiated experiences (where adults initiate the activity and children are free to take it in the direction they choose). Therefore items such as 'encouragement of child initiatives', 'opportunities for child exploration' scored poorly. The educators in this setting had not completed the Teacher Talk training at that time. These messages appear to have been embedded by the settings who had completed the training, potentially resulting in higher scores at the follow-up data collection.

Indeed, for the settings participating in the Programme the Program Quality Assessment scores on adult-child interaction demonstrated improvements in 'support for child communication', 'encouragement of child initiatives', 'support for child learning at group times', 'opportunities for child exploration', 'encouragement for peer interaction', and 'independent problem solving'. This is completely consistent with the principles underpinning the Language Enrichment Programme.

As discussed in 2 Literature Review high quality education and care is ensured by one key factor the quality of the educators' practice. High quality educators are responsive and sensitive to the individual children's



needs, and stimulate the cognitive development of the children.<sup>155</sup> It was also acknowledged that responsiveness and sensitivity is mediated through “the single most important determinant of high quality ECEC ...the interaction between children and staff”.<sup>156</sup> It could be argued that by focussing on interactions as this Programme did that there would be inevitable impacts on overall quality.

The physical learning environment is also significant (see 2 *Literature Review*). The physical learning environment contributes to quality early education when it is aesthetically pleasing with a rich variety of materials which stimulate curiosity and exploration, carefully arranged and stored for accessibility in interest/learning areas.<sup>157, 158</sup> In relation to the PQA improvements were seen in having ‘defined interest areas’, ‘logically located interest areas’, improved ‘outdoor space, equipment, materials’, ‘organisation and labelling of materials’, ‘varied and open-ended materials’, ‘diversity-related materials’ and importantly ‘displays of child-initiated work’. The interviews also revealed a wealth of improvements in the environments. There are also some significant changes to practice, as manifested in the quote, in the provision of learning experiences. There appears to be a welcome reduction in template art where there is little creativity in the process and identical products were made by the children. This indicates a positive impact on creative art experiences. These kinds of learning experiences provide much more opportunity for conversation and extension of children’s learning generally.

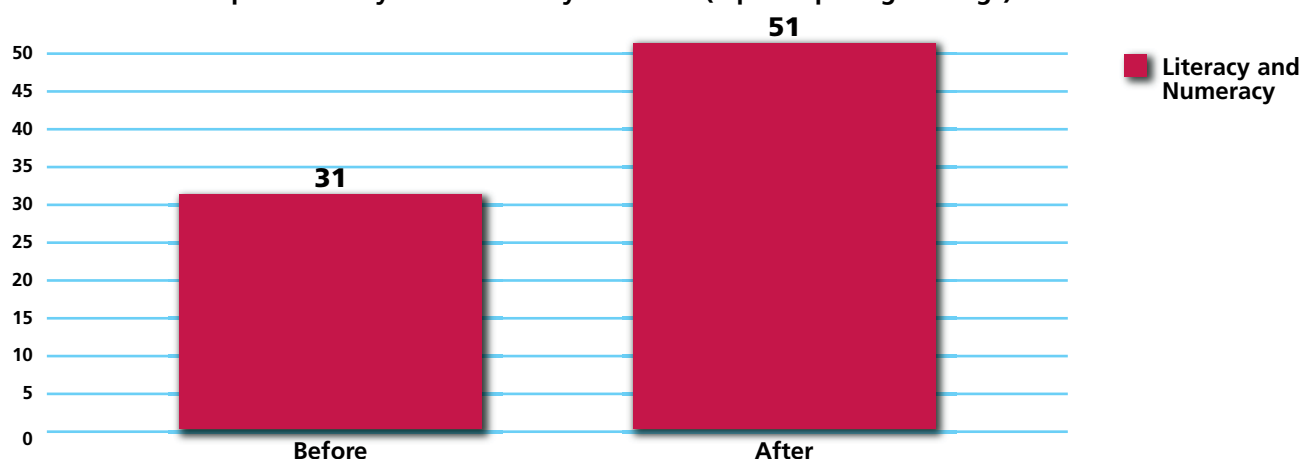
**Now they use blank pages more...children paint and talk about it afterwards and for staff to label the different parts of the picture.**

In relation to the daily routine there was consistency with parts of the day overlapping, flexibility and with appropriate time for each part of day. There was increased ‘time for child planning’ and ‘time for child-initiated activities’. There were opportunities for children to meet at small-group time. At meal times in one setting there was a focus on engaging children in conversation. There was a focus on children going outdoors. Two of the settings had introduced HighScope which resulted in having a comprehensive curriculum model in place, with systems of planning, observation and child records in place.

## 5.2 Literacy and numeracy indicator

The literacy and numeracy indicator is designed to prompt the rater to find evidence of literacy and numeracy practices in early childhood settings. The indicator contains six criteria in relation to literacy and four criteria in relation to numeracy. Each criterion is subdivided into more detailed sub-criteria (see 3.4.3 for more detail). Table 14 provides the overall picture and change score of the impact of the Programme on literacy and numeracy practices in the three participating settings.

**Table 14 Overall impact Literacy and numeracy indicator (3 participating settings)**



It is clear that there has been a positive impact of the Language Enrichment Programme in relation to the educators’ literacy and numeracy practices as a result of participating in the Programme. Table 15 provides the breakdown of those overall results setting by setting.

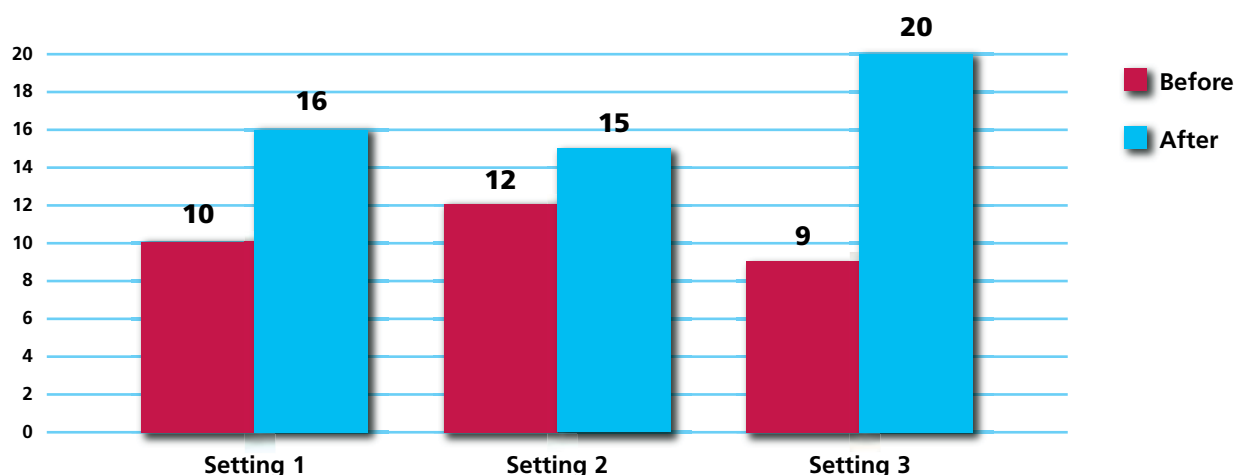
<sup>155</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Research Report No. 356. London: Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>156</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (2006). *Strong Foundations: Early childhood care and education*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, p.6.

<sup>157</sup> Op cite

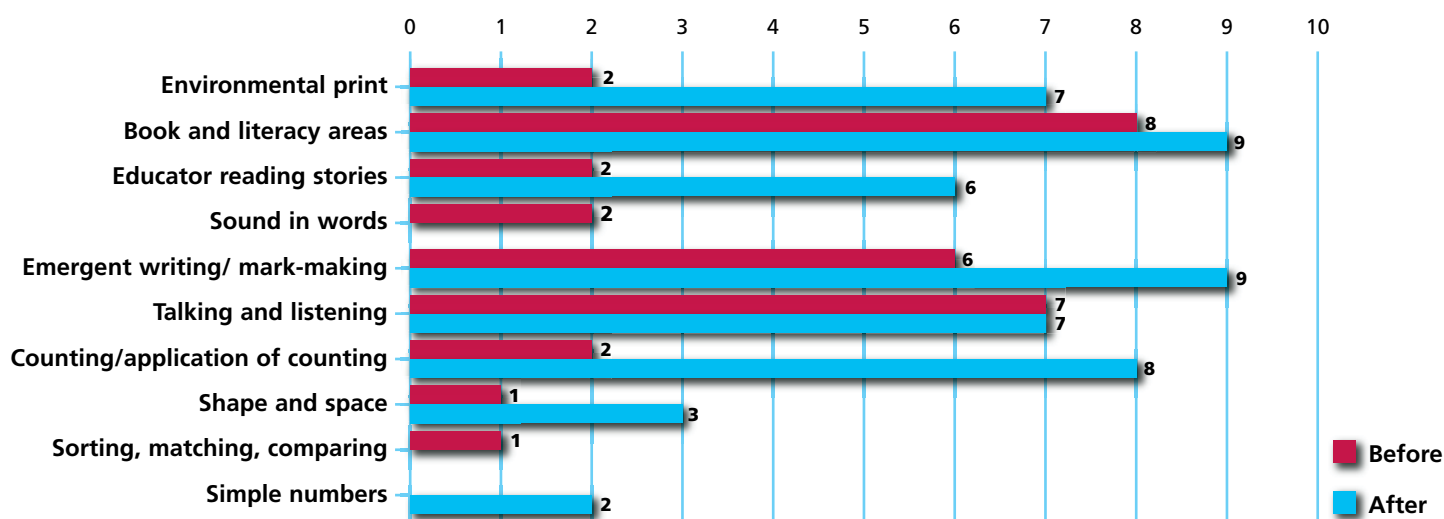
<sup>158</sup> Epstein, A. (2007). *Essentials of active learning in preschool*. Ypsilanti, Michigan: High/Scope Press.

**Table 15 Impact Literacy and Numeracy Indicator Results for each Setting**



Setting 3 started at a lower base and subsequently made significantly higher gains. However, the Programme impacted positively across the settings. Table 16 gives the overall picture of the impact of the Programme to the three settings who completed the Programme at the time of final data gathering in relation to the individual dimensions of the Literacy and Numeracy Indicator.

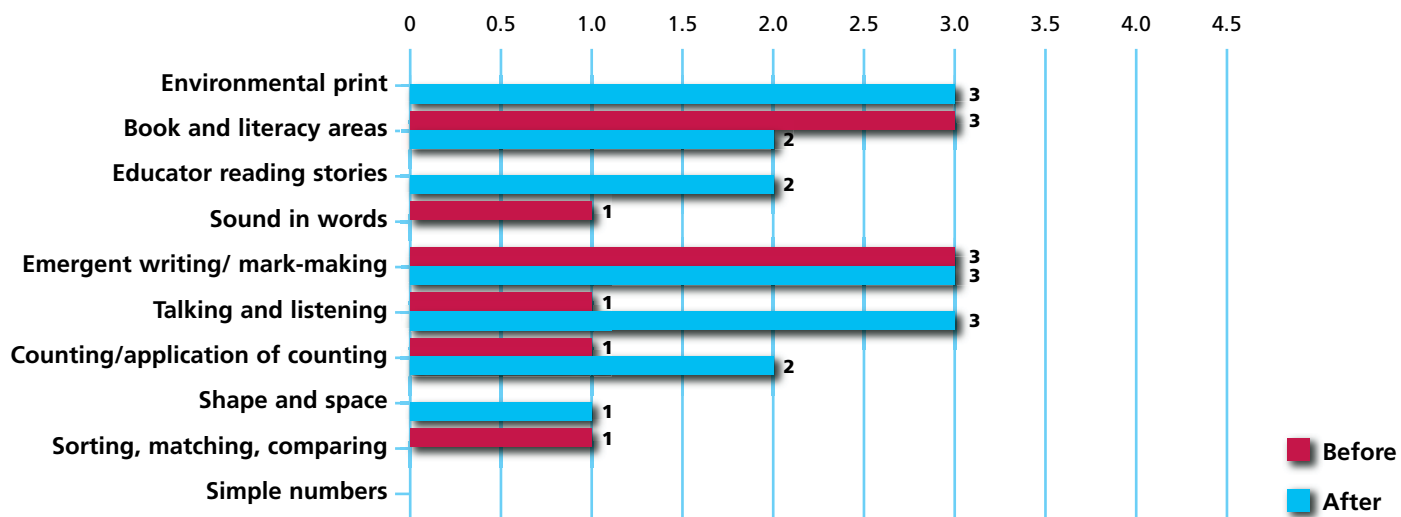
**Table 16 Impact Literacy and Numeracy Indicator Results for each Dimension**



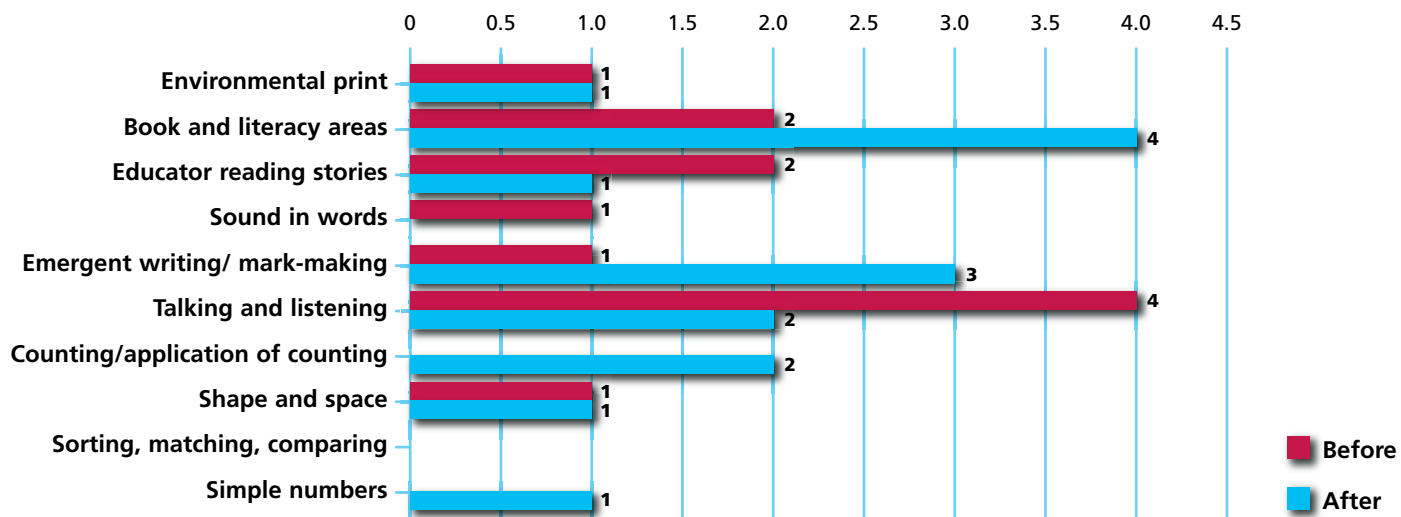
There are 18 such subdivisions for literacy and 15 for numeracy. The literacy and numeracy indicator is scored by scoring one for every occurrence of a sub-criterion. Again, these results clearly suggest an overall moderate improvement in relation to the book and literacy areas, emergent writing/mark making, counting/application of counting and environmental print. There was greater evidence of educators reading stories. The talking and listening criterion remained the same overall but with individual differences (see below).

There were minimal improvements in relation to numeracy with no scores on 'sounds in words' and 'sorting, matching'. 'Sounds in words' refer to clapping games, jumping with young children and attention to linking sounds to letters. 'Sorting, matching' is where children know why a set of shapes is alike and the language of sorting, comparing or matching is used in a variety of contexts and experiences. This finding it is not surprising as the Programme is focussed more on early literacy. The findings at baseline and follow-up are now presented for the four settings.

**Table 17 Setting 1 Literacy and numeracy indicator**



**Table 18 Setting 2 Literacy and numeracy indicator**



**Table 19 Setting 3 Literacy and numeracy indicator**

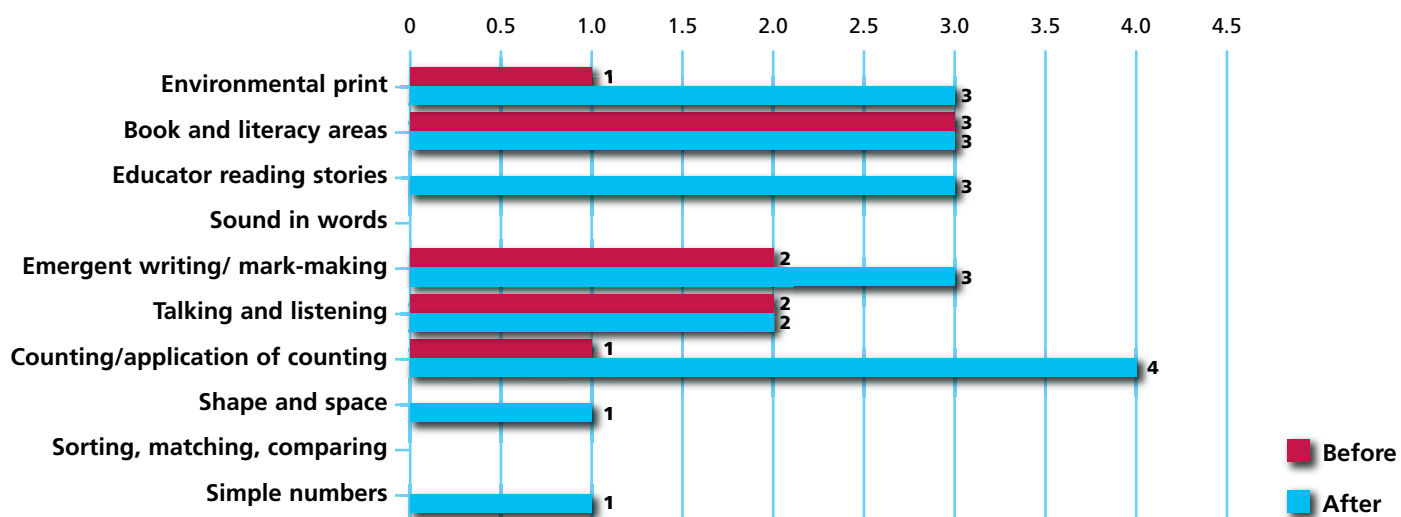
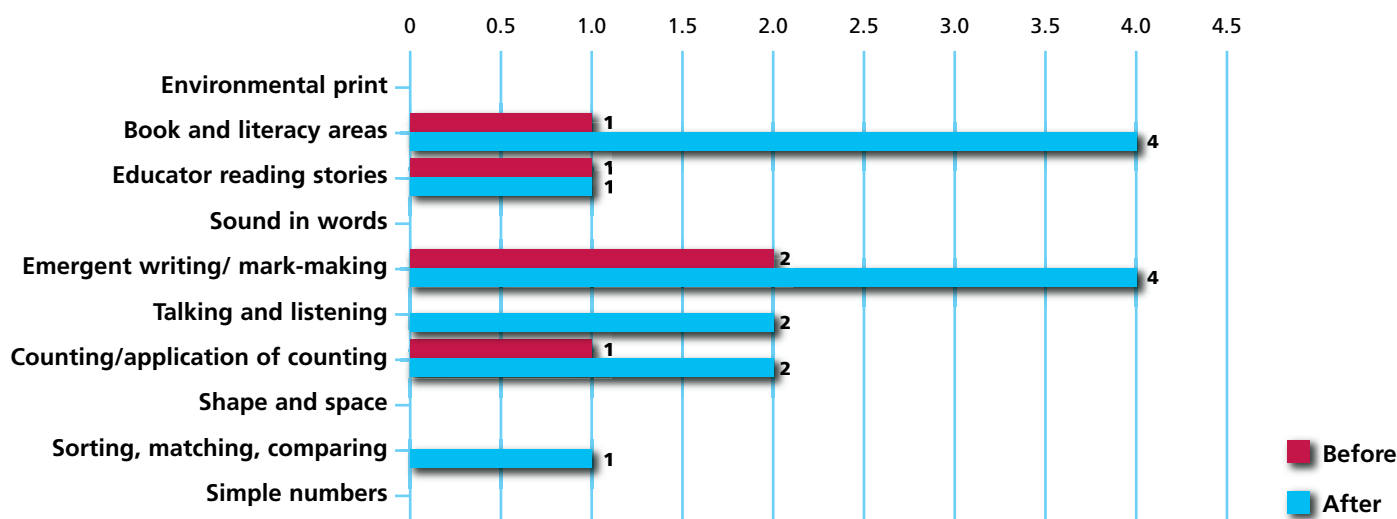


Table 20 Setting 4 Literacy and numeracy indicator



Setting 4 did not fare as well as the other settings in general but showed clear improvements in the book and literacy areas and emergent writing/mark-making suggesting positive impacts accredited to participation in the Aistear training as this setting not completed the Language Enrichment Programme at that time. The following written testimonial suggests that one educator is paying attention to both literacy and numeracy.

I noticed the biggest difference with the book at story time. Before the course I used to sit upright facing the children for story time, I used to hold the book and turn pages. Now I sit beside children, I let them sit on my lap, I let them have more control of the book and when they come to a page of interest I let them stay on that page and try and give them as much language as they are looking for. We take turns and look for certain colours and I count various different objects in the books so it reinforces numeracy.

The literacy and numeracy indicator also recorded clear improvements in relation to literacy and numeracy. Overall there appeared to be greater attention paid to literacy. In a longitudinal study it was found that early numerical skills not only predict later abilities in numeracy, but also predict later abilities in literacy.<sup>159</sup> The same cannot be said for early reading scores; abilities in early literacy at age five seem not to predict numerical abilities at age 10. The answer to this finding is that the kinds of thinking that are involved in numeracy, such as logical thinking, abstraction and problem-solving, have broader application to learning generally than the more specific skills required for literacy. However some numeracy related improvements were made as per example in the quote here.

*We introduced a small little weighing scale with measurements on it so the children can write down what they think baby's weight is on the notepad and pencils available.*

### 5.3 What the interviews revealed about the quality of the environment

The positive findings in relation to the impact of the Programme on the quality of the setting as presented above were verified in the interviews. The impacts on the environment were revealed as follows and could be described as labelling, creating cosy areas for learning and opportunities for literacy, numeracy and writing.

Participants reported that they had changed the environment and were asked in what way had they changed the environment? The educator's own words are used to present the findings. In just one setting...

<sup>159</sup> Duncan, G., Dowsett, C., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston, A., Klebanov, P., Pagani, L., Feinstein, L., Engel, M., Brooks-Gunn, J., Sexton, H., Duckworth, K. & Japel, C. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 43, 1428-1446.



*Before the Hanen programme there were some elements that we were addressing such as we were labelling areas of classroom, areas of play, but... we've zoned in on that in more detail and we have introduced:*

- *Pencils and paper that are at the ready for children's play*
- *A children's laptop...for them to use making appointments because that's modern technology and what's all around them. They use the laptop in the hairdressers and there are magazines for the customers to read while waiting to get their hair done.*
- *Pictures of various foods (dairy, meats, fruits, vegetables) in the shop area, labelled and stuck on to the shop front. So they can see the food groups separated as you would in a real shop. We are hoping to help them use the pictures in tidying up their play. We have money, coins, paper money, a cash register emphasising numeracy*
- *Story books relating to the theme of the month and any emerging interests, children's catalogues*
- *Photo albums... at children's level*
- *A junk-modelling area, painting, water-play and lentil area, tables in the middle for cutting*

In addition we have:

- *Labelled all activities and objects within each room and all labelling is at child's level.*
- *Reviewed our space to have specific play areas in the rooms; providing more opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction.*

In this setting...

- *Children...are encouraged to write their own names – there's a lot more print available to the children now.*
- *One of the biggest issues we had before the programme was the staff using a lot of templates during arts and crafts – where you'd have eight identical Santa's on the wall. Now they use blank pages more...children paint and talk about it afterwards and for staff to label the different parts of the picture.*
- *Story time is a huge element of our day to day routine. Children love exploring books and even more so now that we have created our quiet cosy area... gets away from the hustle and bustle of all the free-play. They can explore books and I've noticed children telling each other their own versions of stories.*

One written example from a setting below refers to the impact of the changed environment on children's play:

*Changing the room layout worked really well too. I would imagine it would work better in one of the older classrooms but it worked considerably well in my room, probably because my children are a little older and all over the 2 year mark. I divided the room in sections; quiet area, construction area, snack area, home corner, all providing different areas of play. It resulted in calmer play with a little more interaction. Before the room change, children were throwing toys around, not really playing with them and I can see now that they were not getting much out of it.*

### **Link to writing**

One educator in one setting reported...

*She (the SLT) drew our attention to the importance of them seeing you writing.*

*They are planning what they want to read. One of them said they wanted to write a book. They have become very interested in writing and numbers. They want to write their names so we support them.*

*The children will often take out the red markers for the writing board/greeting board. And ask: "Can you tell me what day it is and what month and when is your birthday?" and they are writing it as though they are writing on the board.*

*We do a lot more writing now. We've created a small writing area after the last session. It is a very popular area of the room. If anyone wants to be quiet they can go in there and there are pens and paper and envelopes and post-its... One of the children wanted to write a letter to (a colleague). I wrote Dear ... he wrote his name, did a drawing and put it in an envelope and dropped it down to her.*

The evaluator observed an incident in this setting which clearly demonstrated good practice in relation to supporting children to make the link between writing and making meaning. It was break time and some of the children were leaving to go outside. Peter was still having his break but wanted to join the group who were going outside and ran over to the key worker of that group and said "I want to go out with you". Julia (the key worker) said "How about we make an arrangement to meet?" She wrote on a napkin. "Peter, I am going to meet you outside at the climbing frame in 10 minutes, Julia." The boy clutched his napkin, smiling, and ran over to his own key worker to show it to her, who read it out to him. On route to the playground a boy who had been sick dropped in with his Mam to visit. After greetings and hugs Peter waved the napkin in front of his friend and when he got his attention "read" verbatim what was on the napkin. He then said "I've got to go" and ran out to the climbing frame where Julia was waiting for him.

## **5.4 Impact of Programme on educator's awareness of speech, language and communication issues**

The interviews revealed that the educators appreciate children's differing language use – a reluctant child, a sociable child and so on. The educator's awareness of speech, language and communication difficulties has increased. The Programme has resulted in increased confidence of the educators. Again the voices of the educators themselves are used to present the findings.

### **5.4.1 Appreciation of children's differing language use**

*I think probably the biggest and the best advice I got from Trish (the SLT) was that they have different abilities with regard to language. There was always one real vocal child in the room, and a really shy child, and when I started giving him more attention and focus less on the more vocal, I've seen the biggest difference. He did have the language, but he just didn't necessarily have the confidence, and he couldn't get it out.*

*The biggest thing is that we are more aware of the children and their language and their communication, especially those that would be considered the quiet children. I think that staff are noticing those children a lot more.*

*I'm more conscious during circle time and more aware to let the quieter children talk. If one of the more talkative children are speaking over quieter ones, I am more aware to say 'it's 'so and so's' turn to talk now', to let each child contribute their views.*

*My own awareness of the individual needs of the children within the group has risen – you were aware of their needs but I now have the language to go with it - the reluctant child, the passive child, or the sociable child.*

*Focus less on the most vocal child in the room and concentrate more on the least vocal child. There was one child this worked really well with-there was just an explosion of words, this child is now an early sentence user and just has a lot more confidence which is just brilliant to see, his whole character has completely changed.*

One educator reflected on the importance of planning appropriate activities:

*Sometimes you set up small group activities as an activity and not the impact that activity will have on everyone within the group. The training created an awareness of how an activity will impact on your interactions with the child. If you set up appropriate activities you see the interaction within the group – and the level of involvement. When I set up my little activity it wasn't appropriate at all. It was appropriate for some but **not** for all. The ones it wasn't appropriate for, it really wasn't fair on them to be involved in the group. Because they weren't able for it and it highlighted some of their inadequacies.*

*I've also changed where I sit children at group work time or activities. I tend to sit the passive child beside me at all times; I tend to give the passive child the lead role when acting out stories or when doing group activities. I found that this helps a lot around the use of their language development and developing their confidence to speak out.*

We know that the development of speech, language and communication skills are central to learning and development. Arguably the singularly most important ability for a child to acquire is excellent speech, language and communication skills, as the foundation for lifelong learning.<sup>160</sup> The educators appeared to acquire knowledge of, and appreciation for, children's differing language use. Staff knowledge and understanding of child development and learning, and providing appropriate cognitive challenge is one of the key indicators of quality in addition to strategic planning for a wide range of curriculum experiences; and the quality of adult-child verbal interactions through open-ended questioning and extension of children's thoughts.<sup>161</sup> It appears from the findings that the educators are able to position quieter children for optimal language development.

#### 5.4.2 Awareness of speech, language and communication difficulties

In the case of one child the SLT was able to identify one child has an overall language delay. As he speaks English as a second language, the educator had assumed he was quiet due to having to learn two languages. Now he'll have speech and language support in school.

The following is a detailed example from practice (transcribed from interview)

I had one child with definite speech and language delay. I was very caught up and anxious about how will I get this child to use words... he was fourteen months, he wasn't talking. I was putting pressure on him on myself. With Tricia's guidance I took the focus off his age and looked at his actual abilities. He was still a discoverer, so I needed to nurture that, before he became a first word user. The training helped me identify that he was an 'own agenda child' and 'a passive child' combined. That took the pressure off, because it gave me guidance as to where he is developmentally, and how can I work with this.

I really had to really get back to basics and just look at interactions and turn-taking, with or without language. To get his communication going we needed to build up a relationship. I had to turn take with him. So if he was throwing blocks, Tricia would guide me and say - you take a turn at throwing blocks - and eventually he'd wait for me to take a turn, and that would lead to eye contact, and gradually lead to gestures for us to take turns, and then it was peak-a-boo and little ball games, where I'd throw a ball to him and he'd throw it back to me. He actually had to learn that from the start. So something that would have come very naturally in a younger baby just wasn't happening with him.

Now he's almost two, and he's babbling away, and he's got sounds and you know, he's communicating, he's using gestures. We've come a long way, but had I continued the way I was, it would've been stressful for me and stressful for him, and I don't know how far we would've come. I was able to draw up an action plan.

The positive impact of the Listening Groups, in particular turn-taking, mean that children's development of receptive and expressive language may be ensured. Receptive language refers to children's ability to hear which involves listening, understanding and making sense of what people say and forms the basis of communicating. If children don't listen to models of language and vocabulary how can they learn new words? Receptive language is developed before expressive language and is the foundation for expressive language.

The educator's awareness of speech and language difficulties for children has been enhanced. This means that early identification systems and strategies could be in place.<sup>162</sup> The SLT observed children about whom the staff had concerns and validated their opinions as well as supporting the educators to differentiate the curriculum appropriately and providing necessary training. This in turn has increased the confidence of the educators. *I am a lot more aware of children with speech and language problems, and spotting that and being able to support them.* Confident and competent children are at the centre of Aistear. They in turn need to be supported by confident and competent educators.

<sup>160</sup> The Communication Trust. (November 2011). *Written evidence submitted by the Communication Trust to the House of Commons Education Committee*. Retrieved August 4 2012 from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/>

<sup>161</sup> Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Research Report No. 356. London: Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>162</sup> Key principles to consider before using an intervention <https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/schools/what-works/keyprinciples.aspx>. Retrieved 1.11.2013

### 5.4.3 Confidence of the educators

*In small groups there's a lot more communication with the children, and enabling communication between the children. Before maybe they (staff) would have given up a lot easier with children if they weren't getting anywhere with them, now there's a bit more persistence, and I think the professional approach is that they feel more confident in the way they are communicating with children, and encouraging them to communicate.*

*Staff are more at the children's level. Just from conversations with people, they have suggested that they've noticed a change, that they feel more at ease talking to children.*

*And I think Tricia gave us ...really a lot of confidence. She did such a good job.*

*The biggest impact of the programme on one educator was confidence. Tricia, I think was brilliant, because she really gave me the guidance and the confidence as well; I mean from the videos, it did give you confidence. It wasn't just something that was in a book, it was something that you were actually using and putting in place.*

*One of the biggest impacts is the staff. We know what we are doing, we give each other ideas. We plan every day. We have more teamwork. The confidence acquired has inspired the educators to follow children's lead in conversation and build on that. I had a news time most days...everyone gets to say their piece...they may have been at the beach. Then in the playroom we'll make a beach and everyone talks about when they went... they all want to talk about it and get involved, playing as a group. Whereas before ...that'd be the news there and I'd never carry it through to the next room. You think - why didn't I do that before?*

***I felt a lot more confident...to stretch the child's language... repeat after them and give them different words, like polka dot. I thought the puppet Jamal, the Listening Group were invaluable.***

***You wonder why I did not focus on things they enjoy. Why you just go along in a routine? Whereas now; that's what I do (focus on things they enjoy). It has given me more confidence to let the children take a role now.***

## 5.5 Conflict between HighScope and the Programme

In the main most participants felt that HighScope and the Hanen Teacher Talk training were compatible.

*They do fit in very nicely to each other, with the working in small groups with children.*

*HighScope is all about child-direction and choice -there's no contradiction - the Hanen feeds into that.*

*HighScope is working great ... working in partnership with the children. It's not for them or for us it is with them.*

However, there were also two concerns which can be succinctly described as encouragement versus praise and adult-direction versus adult-initiation.

### 5.5.1 Encouragement versus praise

Some of the participants reported:

*It seems to contradict HighScope totally.*

*The only contradiction is the "good sitting". I think if the kids do anything – that is amazing. I'm taking more time to spell it out. You pulled out the chair, you've brought your bowl over to the table and you've scraped your plate.*

*We are not supposed to praise them in HighScope, yet we are encouraged to say good sitting, good listening. You have to catch yourself on and stop yourself from praising. It's a conflict with yourself; especially as we were brought up with good girl – it's easy to revert back.*

*I suppose in the Hanen there would be a lot of praise...that's a bit contradictory of HighScope. ...like 'good listening', 'good sitting'*



Another element that was considered a contradiction was the *adult-directed 'Listening Groups'*. Although it was also pointed out that

*....there is a role for adult-initiated experiences in HighScope. And...*

*In fact I got a much greater understanding of the content of HighScope as a result of the Hanen training.*

These are legitimate conflicts - the use of praise and the apparent directive nature of the Listening Groups. As discussed in 2.2.4, HighScope very specifically focusses on the use of encouragement as opposed to praise.<sup>163</sup> In the 'Listening Groups' educators are encouraged to use the language of 'good sitting' or 'good listening'. The arguments as laid out in 2.2.4 include that praise may manipulate children, create children addicted to praise, diminish a child's pleasure in their own achievements, withdrawal of children's interest once the appraiser's attention is removed and reduce achievement by interfering with how good a job children actually do.

The SLT explained the process as that the "good sitting/listening" is a description of the required behaviour to listen rather than 'praise' delivered in response to a child's behaviour. The concept of "good sitting" is introduced via the puppet who the children immediately identify as not behaving appropriately and they are then given the specific phrase to remind the puppet what to do when in a group and sharing an activity. It is then introduced as a general concept. Before an activity is started the SLT will say "I am looking for someone who is doing 'good sitting' to get a turn." The SLT agrees about the idea of empty praise and advises it has to be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) and is to state to a child what behaviour/observation you appreciate/notice that they are displaying.

In the evaluator's view there does not have to be a conflict. Indeed one of the Hanen Programme consultants has alerted her colleagues to the dangers of over-praising. Lowry advises that "statements like "good girl" or "great job" undermine self-motivation, and don't provide a child with specific information that will help him or her continue the desired behaviour"<sup>164</sup> Lowry suggests instead to say what you see, by providing a simple, evaluation-free statement like "You used a lot of bright colours in your picture" or "Your tower is so tall!". Even a simple "You did it!" tells the child that you noticed, without providing a judgment<sup>165</sup> 'Good listening' and 'good sitting' may be easily changed to 'you are listening', 'you are sitting'. The SLT explains that the terms are used much more as a behaviour guideline to the whole group for them to appreciate the behaviour that will make the group successful. For example when the SLT wants to start an activity and she does not have the all the children's attention she does not comment on each of the children who are doing "good sitting" by names but say in general to the group - "I am waiting for good sitting/listening so I can tell you what we are going to do and I can't do that if everyone is not looking and listening to me - I am waiting." She waits until they all join in. She does not isolate a child for good or poor sitting/listening specifically ever.

Because of the specific focus of a lack of praise in HighScope it can be disconcerting for educators to who are trained in one way to change their practice so radically. In the evaluator's perspective the same approach words can be used while dropping the value judgement of 'good', whether it is for an individual or group. Alternatively, say "I am looking for someone who is 'sitting' to get a turn." Or "I am waiting for sitting/listening".

The other conflict for settings implementing the HighScope approach, as reported by staff, relates to the educator-directed nature of the Listening Groups versus the educator-initiated experiences recommend by HighScope. In educator-directed experiences, the educator decides what to do and how to do it (for example the educator provides pre-cut or pre-drawn shapes to make an Easter Bunny, with instructions on how to assemble it - and all the children's bunnies turn out like the adult's model). In 'educator-initiated' activities the educator usually initiates the idea of making something, and/or chooses the materials this is followed by lots of child creativity (in the process). For example the educator sets out different materials - paper, cotton balls, glue, etc. - to make Easter Bunnies, but allows the children to make them any way that they want.

As discussed (see 1.2.6) the purpose behind the 'Listening Groups' is to support children to listen and attend to an adult and each other. As explained by the Speech and Language Therapist... *children who do not listen to each other do not make good friends and then are upset that no one listens to them or wants to play with them - this is a huge issue. Children really need to learn to take turns as much as attend and listen to each other.*

<sup>163</sup> Epstein, A., Hohmann, M. & Weikart, D. (2008). *Educating young children*. Michigan: High/Scope Press.

<sup>164</sup> Lowry, L. (Hanen SLP and clinical writer). "Good job!" is praising young children a good idea? <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Hanen-Four-Stages-of-Early-Communication.aspx> Retrieved 13.11.2013

<sup>165</sup> Op cite

Again the evaluator agrees that the skill of attending is critically important and believes that there need not be a conflict between the two approaches. Within the HighScope routine 'small group time' (SGT) is a daily occurrence. It is an educator - initiated part of the daily routine. It provides opportunities for educators and children to spend time exploring materials, developing skills, concepts, shared interests and knowledge. Ideas for SGT activities may be generated in a variety of ways. Typically ideas come from children's interests, materials (new, unexplored, underused or favourite), curriculum content, local traditions and community experiences, educator ideas books, internet, other educators.

The Listening Groups are generally for children who are unable to participate in SGT without disruption or who are getting negative adult feedback. These children need to learn the skill of listening. Providing the groups are small, the children are actively engaged in the process, and the experiences are fun – which they appeared to be, for example, bubble games, sticking body parts onto a puppet, and using the puppet generally - SGT offers an ideal opportunity to focus on listening. The success of the SGT is due to the skill of the educator.

In conclusion the interviews clearly established the success of the programme.

## Summary of findings

This chapter centres on the research question: what is the impact of the Language Enrichment Programme on the quality of the setting? The findings reveal that for those settings whose staff, including the managers, engaged in the Programme a significant and positive impact was had on the overall quality of the settings as derived through use of the *Program Quality Assessment* (PQA) in particular the learning environment (which includes attention to literacy and numeracy), the daily routine and adult child interactions. This picture is corroborated by the educators as ascertained through interview and in written submissions of examples of changes to educators' practice. For the settings participating in the Programme the PQA scores on adult-child interaction demonstrated improvements in 'support for child communication', 'encouragement of child initiatives', 'support for child learning at group times', 'opportunities for child exploration', 'encouragement for peer interaction', and 'independent problem solving'. This is completely consistent with the principles underpinning the Programme.

In relation to the *Literacy and Numeracy Indicator* positive findings were recorded on the dimensions of environmental print, book and literacy areas, reading stories, emergent writing, counting, shape and space and simple numbers. Again, these results clearly suggest an improvement in relation to most items with the exception of 'sounds in words' which refers to clapping games, jumping with young children, attention to linking sounds to letters and 'sorting, matching' where children know why a set of shapes is alike; the language of sorting, comparing or matching is used in a variety of contexts and experiences.

The quality of the environment has improved as revealed through the interviews (and observation); activities and objects are labelled, story books are provided relating to children's emergent interests and for reference in interest areas. Cosy new reading areas have been developed in addition to opportunities for literacy, numeracy and writing. There is a strong connection made between language, literacy and the importance of writing.

The Programme had an impact on educator's awareness of speech and language issues. Educators appreciate and understand children's differing abilities with regard to language and communication. They are focussing more on quieter children. As reported in the interviews the educators now have confidence to follow children's lead in learning experiences and conversation. Critically educators now have confidence to identify speech, language and communication issues and to know what to do. This means that early identification systems and strategies could be in place. Confident and competent children are at the heart of Aistear, but they in turn need confident and competent adults.

The potential conflict between HighScope and the Programme which can be succinctly put as encouragement versus praise and adult direction versus adult initiation was addressed and strategies to ensure coherence between the two can be easily adopted. In the first instance in the evaluator's perspective the same approach words can be used while dropping the value judgement of 'good', whether it is for an individual or group. Equally for children who are challenged by sitting and listening, small group time can be a natural vehicle for learning, providing there are small numbers of children, skilled educators and interactive, fun and interesting games as advocated in the Listening Groups. In conclusion the Language Enrichment Programme had a positive impact on the quality of the settings. The next chapter provides an overall summary, conclusions and recommendations.



## Chapter 6

# Conclusions and Recommendations



## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

This final chapter presents a conclusion and recommendations for policy and practice.

### 6.1 Conclusion

In conclusion the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme has had a positive impact on the quality of the educators' interactions and the quality of the early childhood settings. These findings are particularly important for areas where children are at risk of educational inequality. In these areas, designated as disadvantaged, the percentage of children with speech, language and communication needs is approximately 50%.<sup>166</sup> We know that in some areas the average waiting time for Speech and Language Therapy is 15-18 months.<sup>167</sup> Children are therefore starting school with language delay. The Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme addressed the significant role that early childhood settings have in providing language, literacy and social experiences that will support children to engage with and make the kinds of meanings that are expected at school. The Programme focussed on the language, literacy and social experiences which are mainly mediated through interactions between early childhood educators, parents and children.

It is acknowledged that in Ireland 'much work has been accomplished in recent years in terms of highlighting the importance of oral language development in educational settings',<sup>168</sup> in particular the work that is being undertaken to realise the objectives of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy<sup>169</sup> and supports developed to aid early childhood settings to implement Aistear.<sup>170</sup> In order for every child to develop effective speech, language and communication skills and those with speech language and communication needs to have the best opportunity to succeed, we need to develop and maintain speech, language and communication issues as a genuine priority at a national and local level in Ireland. It has been proposed that "the single most important determinant of high quality ECEC is the interaction between children and staff".<sup>171</sup> Therefore Programmes such as the Ballyfermot Early Years Language Enrichment Programme would contribute in a significant way in addressing the speech, language and communication needs of children.

The announcement of a National Quality Support Service is to be welcomed.<sup>172</sup> The support service will employ mentors to enhance quality in early childhood settings. The OECD defines mentoring in the school context as 'as the one-to one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee's expertise and to facilitate their induction into the culture of the profession (in this case, teaching) and into the specific local context.' It also emphasises the importance of selecting suitable mentors and that 'in order to make sure that mentoring works, mentors need good preparation programmes'.<sup>173</sup>

### 6.2 Recommendations for policy

Arising from the positive findings in this study the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme could be a model for the pre-school mentoring programme. The elements of that mentoring could include the following:

- a focus on content knowledge;
- active participation of educators in the learning process;
- coherence with other training – all training to be underpinned by the same principles and theoretical base and aligned with the Irish national frameworks (Aistear and Siolta);

<sup>166</sup> The Communication Trust, [www.communicationtrust.org](http://www.communicationtrust.org)

<sup>167</sup> Hayes, N., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Keegan, S. & Goulding, E. (2013). *Evaluation of the early years programme of the Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

<sup>168</sup> Shiel, G., Cregan, Á., McGough, A & Archer, P. (2012). *Oral language in early childhood and primary education* (3-8 years). Commissioned Research Report No. 14, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p.57.

<sup>169</sup> Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

<sup>170</sup> See the Aistear Toolkit  
[http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment/Early\\_Childhood\\_and\\_Primary\\_Education/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education/Aistear\\_Toolkit/Aistear\\_Toolkit.html](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Early_Childhood_Education/Aistear_Toolkit/Aistear_Toolkit.html)

<sup>171</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (2006). *Strong Foundations: Early childhood care and education*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, p.6.

<sup>172</sup> <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=3067>

<sup>173</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2010). *Equity in education*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.



- the collective participation of educators from the same setting, including the managers  
- as a result it is more likely that systemic change in practice may be promoted over time;
- a continuous programme of intervention;
- Finally and perhaps most importantly, on-site mentoring using video analysis and immediate strengths-based feedback locating opportunities for professional development within an educators' regular work day, supporting connections with early childhood practice.<sup>174</sup>

In relation to delivering onsite mentoring support combined with video-stimulated reflective dialogues "a major challenge to providing this type of high-quality professional development is cost."<sup>175</sup> These results suggest a clear direction for government policy in relation to early childhood settings. In order to provide useful and effective professional development that has a meaningful effect on educator learning and develops improvements in early years practice, funds should be focused on providing high-quality professional development experiences. This requires either to focus resources on fewer early childhood educators, or to invest sufficient resources so that more early years educators can benefit from high-quality professional development.<sup>176</sup> Given the current state of variable early childhood practice in Ireland the latter is the desired option. The worst option would be to employ inexperienced graduates on low salaries. In addition approaches such as the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme should be replicated in all early childhood settings in Ireland, particularly those in areas designated as disadvantaged.

### 6.3 Recommendations for practice

It could be argued that over the next year or so the settings in the evaluation should focus on bedding down the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme (and indeed Aistear training and HighScope training, where relevant). It is therefore recommended that any training that is offered should focus on Language Enrichment Programme refreshers as opposed to taking on something new. The lessons learned through the Language Enrichment Programme need to be consolidated and reinforced in practice.

All learning experiences offered by early childhood settings should support speech, language and communication development to children. The work of Speech and Language Therapists should involve engaging in early childhood educator training programmes such as the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme in all early childhood settings. Every child in early childhood settings can benefit from the ideas shared not just children identified as having obvious language delay or unclear speech.

The potential conflict between the Teacher Talk training and HighScope in relation to praising children is resolvable. It is not a matter of developing a new script, but of keeping in mind our long-term goals for our children and watching for the effects of what we say. Acknowledge children's work and ideas by making specific comments without the value judgement of 'good'. Some examples: "I see that you have painted a picture that has blue paint on the bottom, and red paint along the side." "You are sitting", "You are listening". These kinds of comments serve as non-judgemental responses when children want adult acknowledgement.

The importance of early literacy seems to have been realised in practice in the settings. However, since early numerical skills not only predict later abilities in numeracy, but also predict later abilities in literacy, equal attention should be paid to early numeracy.

The participants in the settings who engaged in the Ballyfermot Language Enrichment Programme appear to have absorbed the messages in relation to reading stories dialogically with children having shared control in story reading, for example turning the pages, examining the pictures and identifying what they see and predicting the story through pictures. Extended purposive conversations occurred in these situations. It is recommended that educators take these principles and apply them in pursuing children's topic of interest in conversation throughout the day.

<sup>174</sup> Garett, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 915-945., p. 937

<sup>175</sup> Op cite, p. 937

<sup>176</sup> Op cite, p. 937

## Appendix 1: Rating Scale for Adult-Child Interaction

| No | Rating Scale<br>Please Tick box which most applies to you                       | Not Sure -<br>need to try this | Sometimes<br>when I remember | As often<br>as I can |
|----|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1  | Face to Face - Are you at the child's level?                                    |                                |                              |                      |
| 2  | Waiting and letting the child choose the activity                               |                                |                              |                      |
| 3  | Watching the child and following what they want to do                           |                                |                              |                      |
| 4  | Commenting/Talking about what they are doing                                    |                                |                              |                      |
| 5  | Using simple language   |                                |                              |                      |
| 6  | Not asking too many questions   |                                |                              |                      |
| 7  | Putting words to the child's message  |                                |                              |                      |
| 8  | Showing that you are listening/<br>interested in what the child is doing/saying |                                |                              |                      |
| 9  | Waiting and giving the child enough time to communicate/initiate                |                                |                              |                      |
| 10 | Giving the child enough time to respond   |                                |                              |                      |
| 11 | Praising the Child  |                                |                              |                      |

### Parent / Carer Self Rating Scale

Please think about the following statements and rate yourself from 0 to 3 for each one, where:

**0 - Never    1 - Sometimes    2 - Often/frequently    3 - Always/as often as is appropriate**

|   | Initial Date | Review Date |
|---|--------------|-------------|
| Letting him/her chose the toy   |              |             |
| Following what he/she wants to do with the toys                                       |              |             |
| Sitting where he/she can see me   |              |             |
| Waiting for him/her to start the talking<br>- with words/sounds/looking/gestures etc. |              |             |
| Giving him/her enough time to talk  |              |             |
| Showing him/her that I'm listening<br>- by looking.answering/repeating                |              |             |
| Commenting on what he/she is doing  |              |             |
| Not asking him/her questions  |              |             |
| Praising him/her  |              |             |
| Talking slowlyenough for him/her<br>to understand me                                  |              |             |

## Appendix 2: Components of Chatter Matters and Listening Groups

### Week 1

#### Introduction/Parents, early years and learning <sup>177</sup>

- Parents, staff and SLT have a meet and greet session over a cup of tea/coffee
- Session 1 of Parents and early years learning started
- RaaRaa Lion video – ‘Time to be quiet’
- Followed by learning experience – ‘Let’s Make a RaaRaa Crown – with card/glue/scissors/glitter/feathers’
- Closing with an action song – “Miss Polly had a dolly” (Fun Song Factory – Favourite 3.59) <sup>178</sup>

### Week 2

#### Parents and early years learning Session 2

- RaaRaa video – ‘RaaRaa finds a voice’
- Followed by learning experience – ‘Creative drawing – let your child be in charge’
- Closing with an action song – “How do you feel today?” (Fun Song Factory 1 Page 0.47)

### Week 3

#### Communication Cookbook 1

- DVD of typical language development and explanation of “tree of language”
- RaaRaa video – ‘Topsy’s musical stones’
- Followed by learning experience – ‘Treasure Hunt’
- Closing with an action song – “I went to school one morning and I walked like this” (Fun Song Factory – Cal 0.45)

### Week 4

#### Communication Cookbook 2 –Listening and Attention – Games to choose and play

- RaaRaa’s favourite things
- Followed by learning experience – ‘Finger puppets’
- Action Song – “head, shoulders, knees and toes” (Fun Song Factory Cal 2.26–/rhythm of the music jungle 51)

### Week 5

#### Communication Cookbook Session 3 –Vocabulary - Games to choose and play

- RaaRaa Lion DVD – ‘RaaRaa’s big roar’
- Followed by learning experience – ‘Sequencing pictures’
- Action Song “In the middle of the night” (Fun Song Factory – with cymbals/shaker/triangle melody 4.37)

### Week 6

#### Communication Cookbook Session 4 – Building Sentences and Conversations

- RaaRaa Lion DVD - “No Sleep till Bedtime”
- Followed by learning experience – ‘10 little monkeys’
- Action Song – “10 little monkeys – with puppets” with blanket for bed time (Fun Song Factory- Cookie 6.11)

### Week 7

#### Communication Cookbook Session 5 – Story Telling - Games to choose and play.

- RaaRaa Lion DVD ‘Oooooo slips up’
- Followed by learning experience – Paper bag lion
- Action Song – “5 currant buns” (Fun Song Factory – biscuits Cal 5.03)

### Week 8 – Open Discussion and Graduation

- RaaRaa Lion DVD ‘zebby’s snack time’
- Followed by learning experience – ‘Rhyming pairs’ – Action Song – “Jelly on a plate” (Fun Song Factory – Favourites 3.09)
- Graduation – Rice Crispie Cake

### Themes of the eight week ‘Listening Group’

Week 1 Ourselves

Week 2 Animals

Week 3 Transport

Week 4 Action

Week 5 The Home

Week 6 School

Week 7 Listen up Activities for Listening

Week 8 Graduation – games that involve listening and turn taking – fun session

<sup>177</sup> For further information see <http://www.peal.org.uk/> and <http://www.peal.org.uk/resources/peal-and-ecu-resources.aspx>

<sup>178</sup> The “cal 0.45” is the video reference used by the SLT to start the action song on the DVD - accessed through <http://www.amazon.com/Fun-Song-Factory-Favourite-Songs/dp/B000AC539G>

## Appendix 3: Internal Evaluations of the Language Enrichment Programme

### BALLYFERMOT NATIONAL EARLY YEARS ACCESS INITIATIVE (NEYAI)

#### FINAL EVALUATION OVERALL RESULTS (ECEC Practitioners)

##### 8 Week Language Enrichment Group

1 Did you find the pack useful?

Yes **10** No **0** No Response **0**

2 Did you find the demonstration sessions useful?

Yes **10** No **0** No Response **0**

3 Do you feel more confident in dealing with children's listening and language as a result of the group?

Yes **10** No **0** No Response **0** (slightly but not much)

4 Do you feel the children's speech and language improved as a result of the group?

Yes **9** No **9** No Response **0** ??

5 Do you feel you can continue to use the pack as a Framework for listening Language groups in your setting?

Yes **10** No **0** No Response **0**

6 If Yes can you say how and if not why?

- a Excellent for circle time
- b For starting off the year as a structured and fun session to introduce children to the concepts of sitting, listening etc
- c I felt it worked very well and the children did improve while attending the 8 weeks
- d I will use them as often as possible with children. Both children and I enjoy the sessions
- e Yes I think it will work great for settling the children into the rooms in September.  
Use it as a small group time
- f I feel it will help with settling new children in come September
- g Pack can be used with children in pre-school rooms to carry out language/listening sessions
- h When opportunity arises to deal with a small group of up to 6 children, but it was not very successful with full group(comprises 10 and may go to 11 in September)
- i With continues support, the pack could be integrated as part of the routine for the target age group

7 Did you find the rating scales easy to complete?

Yes **6** No **1** No Response **0** I did not have time for paperwork - (not aware of ratings scales)



## 8 What has been good about the groups?

- a New information
- b Helpful for reflection on children's needs
- c Great resource to be able to "take from the shelf"
- d Can easily be built on
- e Tricia explained everything very well and all the group sessions were different, easy to follow and the children enjoyed them and definitely improved their language and ability to sit listen and take turns
- f Learning different ways to teach the children listening, sitting, turn taking skills.  
I found learning new ways to hold their attention to be very interesting
- g It has shown me a different way of getting children's attention in a positive way, has shown me how not to feed into children that want all the attention and also to be aware of the children that might be quiet and get lost because of it
- h The new vocabulary, introducing them to the new materials, the children learning to be patient and taking turns
- i I found them to be easy to understand and easy to use with the children
- j Having opportunity to watch a very experienced speech/language professional work with the children from week to week has been brilliant for staff at the centre. Some of the situations were challenging as some require a lot of attention so it was very good to see how these situations were overcome in a calm, positive and effective way.
- k The size of groups, actually seeing and hearing every child have the opportunity to speak up, having a new toy each week
- l Learning new tips on how to develop language in children, being shown ideas for games and activities that teach turn-taking and waiting
- m New ideas. Good for teaching good sitting, listening and looking, new tools for teaching these

## 9 What would you change about the groups

- a Nothing I found it worked very well
- b I would not change anything about the group as I find they work well for myself and the children
- c No
- d Nothing it all worked very well with all the children in my group
- e Just to keep in mind to change materials around so children don't get bored
- f Reducing the amount of time children are involved in the activities all together at one time.  
I think I would pick and choose different activities from the weekly sessions to run at different points during the week.
- g The activities appear very directed which, with HighScope, we are trying to get away from.  
It sometimes seems a contradiction in our working day
- h The time did not suit the parents or children and affected my own working day as well as my lunchtime.  
Early morning would have been more suitable. The format of the group may improve with more structure, as the children consistently got bored and became distracted
- i Maybe have sessions in the morning when children are more alert, fresher

**BALLYFERMOT NATIONAL EARLY YEARS ACCESS INITIATIVE (NEYAI)**  
**FINAL EVALUATION OVERALL RESULTS (ECEC Practitioners)**  
**8 Week Language Enrichment Group**

**10 Did you find the groups useful?**

**Yes 22                  No 1                  No response 0**

**11 Did you find the games, creative activities etc demonstrated by Tricia useful and fun?**

**Yes 21                  No 0                  No response 2**

**12 Did you and your child enjoy the sessions?**

**Yes 22                  No 1                  No response 0**

**13 Do you feel more confident in understanding how your child learns to talk after the groups?**

**Yes 22                  No 1                  No response 0**

**14 Do you feel your child's speech and language improved/developed as a result of the group?**

**Yes 20                  No 4                  No response 0**

**15 What has been good about the groups?**

- n No response(1)
- o It has helped my son understand his focus more on a lot of things, even with storybooks and games at home
- p I found the playtime with the children very helpful
- q Getting to interact in such a large group with other parents and your own child, then being able to go home and talk about it amongst the rest of the family
- r Parents getting together and learning about our children and behaviour
- s Taking part in the games and activities
- t The interaction between parents/kids/teachers was good. I learned and my daughter has gained confidence in talking and mixing with other kids
- u I found some of the hints and tips on asking questions helpful
- v Just made small changes to how I speak to my child but made such a big difference, especially learning to share a book rather than just reading it to him
- w The group gave me the opportunity to meet up with other parents, spending more time with my kids, more patient with them and listen more to them
- x Found it interesting, it gets you to learn more about your children and different things to do. We enjoyed the 6 weeks sessions
- y Learning how to listen and talk to your child
- z Meeting and talking with the other mothers
- aa It helps us communicate with our child more effectively and it helped to improve the child's language

- bb Playing games and learning about communicating while walking down road.  
I thought it was very good, good learning
- cc Spending time with my son, learning new tips about talking to my child, understanding things from his point of view
- dd The games improved in his speech and made him gain more confidence in engaging in conversations. We purchased similar games for home use following the steps Tricia used. That has been great and he has been picking up new words and using sentences completely
- ee Learning how you can teach your child different ways to develop his or her language
- ff The group helped my daughter to be more interactive.  
We learned some easy and interesting learning methods for children
- gg Being able to understand how to deal with situations that involve the child better
- hh Spending time in school with my child
- ii Very friendly good atmosphere, very good example of different activities for children to use at home and crèche. Benefits for social development too
- jj Meeting someone that could explain in sentences I could understand, not like the way doctors do. The way we can teach speech through play was much easier than I thought and the information provided to bring home. Getting to spend 1 to 1 time with my child. Watching how my child interacted with other children. Very interesting and I felt I learned a lot about speech and my child's personality. Tutor was very helpful, friendly and understanding, easy to approach which is very important.

#### **16 What would you change about the groups**

- j Nothing(7)
- k Not much, maybe a different day due to my own preferences and personal duties
- l I was happy the way the group was run
- m Nothing, Tricia was a lovely lady and Sienna and I enjoyed the group thoroughly Thanks
- n More contact with kids (talk with them)
- o Maybe make the sessions longer
- p Nothing, we really enjoyed the sessions
- q Nothing, I was satisfied and impressed with everything
- r I would like you to involve more parents with their children in the groups to make it more vibrant
- s I felt that if parents had more input in the games, the children would have benefited more.  
Maybe parents could have given more feedback
- t I would probably make the session last a lot longer or more than 1 session in a week.

#### **17 Any further comments?**

- a Tricia was very approachable and encouraging
- b It would be great to run the 8 weeks again and have parent involvement again as they seemed to enjoy it a lot
- c Very happy with the training
- d It has been a great opportunity to watch the children grow and learn in terms of their language and

listening skills within this small group. In the future, I feel these language groups will be beneficial to use with new children at the beginning of the year

- e The prospect of working with a small group of up to 6 is very appealing but the reality is we work with 10 (soon to be 11) children. It is only teasing us working in these small groups. Our attendance is very good throughout the year so we seldom have less than 9/10 at any one time
- f The groups in theory are a great idea but when put into practice, did not seem to have the desired effect. Parents regularly did not attend and I felt uncomfortable and awkward being in such a small group. The parents should have been given more incentive to attend

#### 18 Any further comments?

- g I found it very helpful to know that everyday activities e.g. cooking, cleaning help my son with his speech. Thank you for all your help and advice. I'm really sorry I didn't get to finish the sessions
- h Really enjoyed this group, hope to do something similar in the future
- i Would have been better for my son to have stayed for the whole session
- j Just to thank everyone involved with the group. My daughter and I have benefited and would enjoy doing the group again
- k Thanks You
- l I just want to thank Tricia for giving me the opportunity to join the group
- m It was a great experience, thank you very much
- n It gave me more confidence when dealing with and understanding situations with my son
- o Some of the games were not age appropriate, was not really for me
- p Great to see how Evan's teachers/helpers would calm down after he got upset. Nice to see the bond between them.

#### 19 Did you find the sessions with parents useful?

**Yes 6** (the sessions were very beneficial for the parents, more so than the staff)

**No 0**

**No response 0**

#### 20 Did you find the ideas, games and resources beneficial?

**Yes 6**

**No 0**

**No response 0**

#### 21 Do you feel more confident in supporting parents and their children with a speech and language delay as a result of the group?

**Yes 6**

**No 0** (only marginally)

**No response 0**

#### 22 Do you feel the children's speech and language improved as a result of the group?

**Yes 4**

**No 2**

**No response 0**

#### 23 Do you feel you might use this Framework for parent groups in your setting?

**Yes 5**

**No 1**

**No response 0**



**24 If Yes can you say how and if not why?**

- j I hope to run the sessions with new parents that come into the setting during the new school term
- k Just to help the parents and the children will benefit from it
- l To have a group meeting every fortnight to keep it fresh
- m Establish a 6/8 week course with new pre-school parents in September, with good opportunity for parent discussion and input
- n No – personally it would not be my choice to work with a parent group.  
Although we have a beautiful new building, the area allocated is not conducive to this purpose
- o By integrating it into the curriculum and requiring attendance from all children and parents

**25 Do you feel the parents gained from attending the group?**

**Yes 5          No 1          No response 0**

**26 If yes in what way?**

- b They would have found some of Tricia's tips and ideas very useful to use at home with their children
- c Some parents were saying that they never had time and they are making time to spend with their child and playing with their child
- d. Parents could understand how children from an early age can learn language
- e Their confidence grew from week to week, with positive changes in how they interacted with their children, other parents and staff who were involved
- f. It was a comfortable environment.  
They had opportunity to ask any questions or raise any issues they needed help with
- g. They learned a lot and were encouraged to engage with their children.

**27. What has been good about the groups?**

- kk Groups were very relaxed and informal, no one felt under pressure to have to speak up, so parents were willing to participate most of the time. As the weeks went on parents started to open up more and become more confident as well as making new friends
- ll The parents were asking Tricia for advice and the kids love Lucy the puppet and the games and songs
- mm Getting parents and staff together, having each other's support
- nn There are a number of very positive aspects about the groups. I feel that using these groups with new parents in September would be an excellent support to getting parents involved and integrating with the service. Not only does it offer a way of engaging with parents but the advice and tips offered over the 8 weeks are invaluable in helping parents encourage communication and language with their children when used at home, having a positive impact between parents/children which in turn will encourage holistic development of children.
- oo The simplicity of topics, the ease in which Patricia made interactions within families appear, opportunities to ask for guidance from Patricia, parents recognising the value of their own input to assisting their child
- pp Building relationships with the parents and being able to support them and discuss concerns and so on with them

## 28. What would you change about the groups

- u The timing was difficult at times – sometimes it was too short and content was rushed so there wasn't always the time for completion of activities or a chance for parents to stay at the end of a session to chat with Tricia about issues they may not have wanted to disclose to the rest of the group.
- v Nothing
- w Just to make sure the times suit everyone
- x Time of group – morning for morning parents and afternoon for afternoon parents, more opportunity for discussion time between staff and parents. The parents' groups were sometimes a bit too rushed and parents did not have much opportunity to give their own experiences and ideas, which I think they would appreciate. More time for parent/child interaction group, sometimes felt it was a bit rushed, smaller groups of parents/children
- y Watching the DVDs, singing and dancing , a lot of parents struggle with this in public
- z I would ensure that more parents attend the group. I found it very worrying that some of the parents had no interest in attending, when their children are obviously suffering from language delays. The format could be changed so that parents who sign up to the groups are required to attend a minimum of 5 of the 8 sessions. This would also prevent embarrassment and awkwardness for the staff members

## 29. Any further comments?

- q Overall the 8 weeks was very useful and beneficial and parents enjoyed it overall
- r I would like to thank Tricia for everything
- s. The 8 week language enrichment programme was a great opportunity and experience for all involved- staff, parents and children. When used for induction of new parents/children, I feel it will be an invaluable resource for engaging parents to communicate with their children in a more meaningful and supportive way. Therefore in order to establish the course and get it up and running successfully with parents, I feel further support in September is necessary for staff running the parent groups and also for staff who have completed the Teacher Talk training to support them run the language/listening groups with children
- t Over the weeks the parents seemed to enjoy the sessions. It was done in a relaxed atmosphere and gave parents plenty of opportunity to question and reason with Patricia

## Appendix 4: Common Themes from Interview

The questions asked at the beginning of the interviews began with:

- In what way has the Language Enrichment Programme training impacted on your practice to date?
- If you were to choose one key area of learning for you as a result of the Teacher Talk training what would that be?
- Can you give at least two concrete examples of how your practice has changed (if any)?

The questions asked in course of the interviews were more organic and flexible and arose as part of the conversations. These included the use of video, the process of the training, any criticisms, and any conflicts with what they know in addition to other queries. In analysing the responses to these questions some common themes emerged:

### Impact of Programme on educator's Interactions

1. Providing space, time and opportunity for children to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and language succinctly put as "let them (children) talk" by one respondent. The idea of standing back and allowing children to express themselves through play in turn was highly influenced by the process of learning to Observe, Wait and Listen.
2. Story time has changed, reflected within the sub themes of the importance of positioning children, not correcting children's language or perspective, relinquishing conversational control in story reading, creating an appropriate environment for dialogic reading, extending vocabulary, spending more time reading a story.
3. The positive impact of the listening groups, in particular turn-taking.

### Impact of Programme on educator's awareness of speech and language issues

4. The educators appreciate children's differing language use – the reluctant child, the sociable child and so on.
5. Educator's awareness of speech and language difficulties.
6. Increased confidence of the educators.

### Impact of the Programme on the quality of the setting

7. The positive impact on the learning environment, particularly in relation to literacy, numeracy and writing.
8. Other impacts on practice, sub-themes include children as creators of their own learning, supporting children to engage with each other, generation of new ideas, and imitating children.

### Programme delivery

9. The engagement of the managers appeared to secure the success of the programme.
10. The use of videos and the process of video-stimulated reflective dialogues and self-evaluation.
11. The skills of the particular SLT combining a strengths-based focus with expertise to model the required strategies, to suggest new approaches and encourage practice of those approaches and to pick up on the language issues of the children.
12. Programme delivery could have been shorter

### Conflict between the Programme and HighScope

13. Conflict between the Language Enrichment Programme and the HighScope approach

### Differentiation the Impact of the Programme and other Interventions

14. Differentiating impact of the Language Enrichment Programme, HighScope or Aistear Training

## Appendix 5: Detail of Program Quality Assessment Results

### Setting 1 PQA

|  | Date             | Date            | Change      |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>I LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b>                | <b>24.4.2012</b> | <b>1.7.2013</b> |             |
| A Safe and Healthy Environment               | 5                | 5               | 0           |
| B Defined interest areas                     | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| C Logically located interest areas           | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| D Outdoor space, equipment, materials        | 4                | 5               | 1           |
| E Organisation and labelling of materials    | 4                | 3               | -1          |
| F Varied and open-ended materials            | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| G Plentiful materials                        | 4                | 5               | 1           |
| H Diversity-related materials                | 3                | 4               | 1           |
| I Displays of child-initiated work           | 3                | 5               | 2           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>35</b>        | <b>39</b>       | <b>4</b>    |
| <b>II DAILY ROUTINE</b>                      | <b>24.4.2012</b> | <b>1.7.2013</b> |             |
| A Consistent daily routine                   | 3                | 4               | 1           |
| B Parts of the day                           | 3                | 5               | 2           |
| C Appropriate time for each part of day      | 4                | 5               | 1           |
| D Time for child planning                    | 4                | 3               | -1          |
| E Time for child-initiated activities        | 5                | 5               | 0           |
| F Time for child recall                      | 1                | 4               | 3           |
| G Small-group time                           | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| H Large-group time                           | 3                | 5               | 2           |
| I Choices during transition times            | 3                | 5               | 2           |
| J Cleanup time with reasonable choices       | 3                | 4               | 1           |
| K Snack or meal time                         | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| L Outside time                               | 3                | 5               | 2           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>40</b>        | <b>53</b>       | <b>13</b>   |
| <b>III ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS</b>          | <b>24.4.2012</b> | <b>1.7.2013</b> |             |
| A Meeting basic physical needs               | 5                | 5               | 0           |
| B Handling separation from home              | 5                | 5               | 0           |
| C Warm and caring atmosphere                 | 5                | 4               | -1          |
| D Support for child communication            | 3                | 4               | 1           |
| E Support for non-English speakers           | 0                | 0               | 0           |
| F Adults as partners in play                 | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| G Encouragement of child initiatives         | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| H Support for child learning at group times  | 3                | 4               | 1           |
| I Opportunities for child exploration        | 3                | 5               | 2           |
| J Acknowledgement of child efforts           | 1                | 2               | 1           |
| K Encouragement for peer interaction         | 1                | 3               | 2           |
| L Independent problem solving                | 3                | 4               | 1           |
| M Conflict resolution                        | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>38</b>        | <b>45</b>       | <b>7</b>    |
| <b>IV CURRICULUM PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT</b> | <b>24.4.2012</b> | <b>1.7.2013</b> |             |
| A Curriculum model                           | 5                | 5               | 0           |
| B Team teaching                              | 0                | 5               | 5           |
| C Comprehensive child records                | 5                | 5               | 0           |
| D Anecdotal note taking by staff             | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| E Use of child observation measure           | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>18</b>        | <b>23</b>       | <b>5</b>    |
| <b>NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS NOT RATED</b>   | <b>1</b>         | <b>1</b>        |             |
| <b>NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS RATED</b>       | <b>38</b>        | <b>38</b>       |             |
| <b>TOTAL CLASSROOM SCORE</b>                 | <b>131</b>       | <b>160</b>      |             |
| <b>AVERAGE CLASSROOM SCORE</b>               | <b>3.45</b>      | <b>4.21</b>     | <b>0.76</b> |



## Setting 2 PQA

|   | Date      | Date      | Change   |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|
| I LEARNING ENVIRONMENT                    | 18.4.2012 | 27.6.2013 |          |
| A Safe and Healthy Environment            | 5         | 5         | 0        |
| B Defined interest areas                  | 2         | 3         | 1        |
| C Logically located interest areas        | 3         | 5         | 2        |
| D Outdoor space, equipment, materials     | 5         | 5         | 0        |
| E Organisation and labelling of materials | 2         | 3         | 1        |
| F Varied and open-ended materials         | 3         | 3         | 0        |
| G Plentiful materials                     | 5         | 5         | 0        |
| H Diversity-related materials             | 1         | 3         | 2        |
| I Displays of child-initiated work        | 2         | 3         | 1        |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>28</b> | <b>35</b> | <b>7</b> |

| II DAILY ROUTINE                        | 18.4.2012 | 27.6.2013 |          |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|
| A Consistent daily routine              | 4         | 4         | 0        |
| B Parts of the day                      | 4         | 4         | 0        |
| C Appropriate time for each part of day | 4         | 5         | 1        |
| D Time for child planning               | 1         | 1         | 0        |
| E Time for child-initiated activities   | 3         | 5         | 2        |
| F Time for child recall                 | 1         | 1         | 0        |
| G Small-group time                      | 4         | 4         | 0        |
| H Large-group time                      | 2         | 3         | 1        |
| I Choices during transition times       | 2         | 4         | 2        |
| J Cleanup time with reasonable choices  | 2         | 3         | 1        |
| K Snack or meal time                    | 2         | 2         | 0        |
| L Outside time                          | 1         | 3         | 2        |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>30</b> | <b>39</b> | <b>9</b> |

| III ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS                | 18.4.2012 | 27.6.2013 |          |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|
| A Meeting basic physical needs              | 5         | 5         | 0        |
| B Handling separation from home             | 5         | 5         | 0        |
| C Warm and caring atmosphere                | 4         | 4         | 0        |
| D Support for child communication           | 3         | 4         | 1        |
| E Support for non-English speakers          | 0         | 0         | 0        |
| F Adults as partners in play                | 5         | 5         | 0        |
| G Encouragement of child initiatives        | 3         | 4         | 1        |
| H Support for child learning at group times | 3         | 4         | 1        |
| I Opportunities for child exploration       | 3         | 5         | 2        |
| J Acknowledgement of child efforts          | 3         | 2         | -1       |
| K Encouragement for peer interaction        | 3         | 3         | 0        |
| L Independent problem solving               | 3         | 3         | 0        |
| M Conflict resolution                       | 3         | 2         | -1       |
| <b>Total</b>                                | <b>43</b> | <b>46</b> | <b>3</b> |

| IV CURRICULUM PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT | 18.4.2012 | 27.6.2013 |          |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| A Curriculum model                    | 3         | 3         | 0        |
| B Team teaching                       | 2         | 2         | 0        |
| C Comprehensive child records         | 4         | 4         | 0        |
| D Anecdotal note taking by staff      | 3         | 3         | 0        |
| E Use of child observation measure    | 5         | 5         | 0        |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>17</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>0</b> |

|                                     |      |      |      |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|
| NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS NOT RATED | 1    |      |      |
| NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS RATED     | 38   | 38   |      |
| TOTAL CLASSROOM SCORE               | 118  | 137  |      |
| AVERAGE CLASSROOM SCORE             | 3.11 | 3.61 | 0.50 |

### Setting 3 PQA

|  | Date             | Date             | Change      |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------|
| <b>I LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b>                | <b>25.4.2013</b> | <b>26.6.2013</b> |             |
| A Safe and Healthy Environment               | 3                | 4                | 1           |
| B Defined interest areas                     | 2                | 5                | 3           |
| C Logically located interest areas           | 4                | 5                | 1           |
| D Outdoor space, equipment, materials        | 1                | 5                | 4           |
| E Organisation and labelling of materials    | 3                | 4                | 1           |
| F Varied and open-ended materials            | 4                | 5                | 1           |
| G Plentiful materials                        | 5                | 4                | -1          |
| H Diversity-related materials                | 3                | 3                | 0           |
| I Displays of child-initiated work           | 3                | 5                | 2           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>28</b>        | <b>40</b>        | <b>12</b>   |
| <b>II DAILY ROUTINE</b>                      | <b>25.4.2013</b> | <b>26.6.2013</b> |             |
| A Consistent daily routine                   | 3                | 5                | 2           |
| B Parts of the day                           | 4                | 4                | 0           |
| C Appropriate time for each part of day      | 3                | 5                | 2           |
| D Time for child planning                    | 2                | 3                | 1           |
| E Time for child-initiated activities        | 5                | 4                | -1          |
| F Time for child recall                      | 3                | 3                | 0           |
| G Small-group time                           | 2                | 4                | 2           |
| H Large-group time                           | 2                | 5                | 3           |
| I Choices during transition times            | 2                | 5                | 3           |
| J Cleanup time with reasonable choices       | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| K Snack or meal time                         | 2                | 5                | 3           |
| L Outside time                               | 2                | 5                | 3           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>35</b>        | <b>53</b>        | <b>18</b>   |
| <b>III ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS</b>          | <b>25.4.2013</b> | <b>26.6.2013</b> |             |
| A. Meeting basic physical needs              | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| B Handling separation from home              | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| C Warm and caring atmosphere                 | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| D Support for child communication            | 3                | 4                | 1           |
| E Support for non-English speakers           | 0                | 0                | 0           |
| F Adults as partners in play                 | 2                | 3                | 1           |
| G Encouragement of child initiatives         | 3                | 4                | 1           |
| H Support for child learning at group times  | 1                | 4                | 3           |
| I Opportunities for child exploration        | 2                | 4                | 2           |
| J Acknowledgement of child efforts           | 2                | 3                | 1           |
| K Encouragement for peer interaction         | 3                | 5                | 2           |
| L Independent problem solving                | 2                | 5                | 3           |
| M Conflict resolution                        | 3                | 3                | 0           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>36</b>        | <b>50</b>        | <b>14</b>   |
| <b>IV CURRICULUM PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT</b> | <b>25.4.2013</b> | <b>26.6.2013</b> |             |
| A Curriculum model                           | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| B Team teaching                              | 2                | 4                | 2           |
| C Comprehensive child records                | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| D Anecdotal note taking by staff             | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| E Use of child observation measure           | 5                | 5                | 0           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>22</b>        | <b>24</b>        | <b>2</b>    |
| <b>NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS NOT RATED</b>   | <b>1</b>         | <b>1</b>         |             |
| <b>NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS RATED</b>       | <b>38</b>        | <b>38</b>        |             |
| <b>TOTAL CLASSROOM SCORE</b>                 | <b>121</b>       | <b>167</b>       |             |
| <b>AVERAGE CLASSROOM SCORE</b>               | <b>3.18</b>      | <b>4.39</b>      | <b>1.21</b> |

## Setting 4 PQA

|  | Date             | Date            | Change      |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>I LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b>                | <b>20.4.2013</b> | <b>2.7.2013</b> |             |
| A Safe and Healthy Environment               | 4                | 5               | 1           |
| B Defined interest areas                     | 1                | 1               | 0           |
| C Logically located interest areas           | 1                | 3               | 2           |
| D Outdoor space, equipment, materials        | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| E Organisation and labeling of materials     | 1                | 1               | 0           |
| F Varied and open-ended materials            | 1                | 3               | 2           |
| G Plentiful materials                        | 3                | 5               | 2           |
| H Diversity-related materials                | 1                | 3               | 2           |
| I Displays of child-initiated work           | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>19</b>        | <b>28</b>       | <b>9</b>    |
| <b>II DAILY ROUTINE</b>                      | <b>20.4.2013</b> | <b>2.7.2013</b> |             |
| A Consistent daily routine                   | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| B Parts of the day                           | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| C Appropriate time for each part of day      | 5                | 4               | -1          |
| D Time for child planning                    | 1                | 1               | 0           |
| E Time for child-initiated activities        | 2                | 2               | 0           |
| F Time for child recall                      | 1                | 1               | 0           |
| G Small-group time                           | 4                | 2               | -2          |
| H Large-group time                           | 4                | 1               | -3          |
| I Choices during transition times            | 2                | 5               | 3           |
| J Cleanup time with reasonable choices       | 1                | 2               | 1           |
| K Snack or meal time                         | 2                | 2               | 0           |
| L Outside time                               | 3                | 0               | -3          |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>31</b>        | <b>26</b>       | <b>-5</b>   |
| <b>III ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS</b>          | <b>20.4.2013</b> | <b>2.7.2013</b> |             |
| A Meeting basic physical needs               | 5                | 5               | 0           |
| B Handling separation from home              | 3                | 4               | 1           |
| C Warm and caring atmosphere                 | 5                | 4               | -1          |
| D Support for child communication            | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| E Support for non-English speakers           | 2                | 2               | 0           |
| F Adults as partners in play                 | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| G Encouragement of child initiatives         | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| H Support for child learning at group times  | 3                | 1               | -2          |
| I Opportunities for child exploration        | 3                | 2               | -1          |
| J Acknowledgement of child efforts           | 2                | 3               | 1           |
| K Encouragement for peer interaction         | 3                | 3               | 0           |
| L Independent problem solving                | 2                | 3               | 1           |
| M. Conflict resolution                       | 0                | 1               | 1           |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>37</b>        | <b>37</b>       | <b>0</b>    |
| <b>IV CURRICULUM PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT</b> | <b>20.4.2013</b> |                 |             |
| A Curriculum model                           | 1                | 1               | 0           |
| B Team teaching                              | 1                | 2               | 1           |
| C Comprehensive child records                | 4                | 4               | 0           |
| D Anecdotal note taking by staff             | 1                | 1               | 0           |
| E Use of child observation measure           | 4                | 3               | -1          |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>11</b>        | <b>11</b>       | <b>0</b>    |
| <b>NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS NOT RATED</b>   | <b>1</b>         |                 |             |
| <b>NUMBER OF CLASSROOM ITEMS RATED</b>       | <b>38</b>        | <b>39</b>       |             |
| <b>TOTAL CLASSROOM SCORE</b>                 | <b>98</b>        | <b>102</b>      |             |
| <b>AVERAGE CLASSROOM SCORE</b>               | <b>2.58</b>      | <b>2.62</b>     | <b>0.04</b> |





## Consortium Members of Ballyfermot Early Years Language and Learning Initiative

**Ballyfermot Chapelized Partnership (Lead Agency)**  
4 Drumfinn Park  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Ballyfermot Star**  
7 Drumfinn Park  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Ballyfermot Family Resource Centre**  
Lynch's Lane  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project**  
Civic Centre  
Ballyfermot Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Cherry Orchard Community Childcare Service**  
Croftwood Crescent  
Cherry Orchard, Dublin 10

**Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service**  
Cherry Orchard Family Centre  
Cherry Orchard Avenue, D10

**Markiewicz Community Centre Crèche**  
205 Decies Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Mary Queen of Angels Early Start**  
Gurteen Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Mary Queen of Angels Primary Schools**  
Gurteen Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Claire's Playgroup**  
Ballyfermot Family Resource Centre  
Lynch's Lane  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Gabriel's Pre-school**  
Ballyfermot Rd  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Gabriel's Primary School**  
Ballyfermot Rd  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Louise's Early Start**  
Drumfinn Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Louise's Primary School**  
Drumfinn Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Matthew's Playgroup**  
5 Drumfinn Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Michael's Pre-school**  
Kylemore Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Michael's Primary School**  
Kylemore Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St. Raphael's Pre-school**  
Kylemore Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St. Raphael's Primary School**  
Kylemore Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Ultan's Primary School**  
Cherryorchard Avenue  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Ultan's Childcare Centre**  
Cherryorchard Avenue  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**St Vincent's Early Childhood Development Service**  
Ballyfermot/Palmerstown  
Primary Care and Mental  
Health Campus  
Ballyfermot Rd  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**The Base Early Education Centre**  
Blackditch Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Treasure Tots Nursery**  
Le Fanu House  
3B Le Fanu Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Woodlands Crèche**  
Ballyfermot Family Resource Centre  
Lynch's Lane  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**Director of Public Health Nurses**  
HSE  
Ballyfermot/Palmerstown  
Primary Care and Mental  
Health Campus  
Ballyfermot Road  
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

**HSE Speech and Language Therapy**  
Acorn Unit  
Cherry Orchard Hospital, D10

# "Let them talk"



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