



Language Intervention in the Early Years

An invitation to support the implementation of a Newcastle University study

The research project:

Newcastle University is conducting a research project to evaluate the effectiveness of language interventions for pre-school children, in nursery contexts, with significant language difficulties. We are contacting you as we are looking for Local Authority and school partners to help us identify potential participants.

Around 10% of children in the UK have language difficulties, rising to 40% in the most socially disadvantaged areas. Research has consistently shown that children who do not recover from such difficulties are at risk of adverse longer-term outcomes such as unemployment and poorer economic and psychological well-being.

One approach to address this issue is to target 'at-risk' children with interventions designed to promote language skills in the early years. However, few interventions have been formally evaluated.



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The benefits of the project:

This is an excellent opportunity to involve local authority staff and schools in innovative research. There is no cost for participating in the project.

- Eligible children, in all participating schools, will benefit from receiving a language intervention delivered by a qualified speech and language therapist. For 'Continuing Classroom Support' schools this will be at the end of the project.
- All schools will have access to a series of CPD sessions, offered by the research team, focused on supporting children with language difficulties. This will increase the skills of staff and support schools to achieve their goal of providing effective language support to all children.
- All schools will receive a certificate in recognition of their work as a research participant and their commitment to promoting robust language development in the early years.
- Whichever group a school is in, they will be helping to identify which intervention is most appropriate. All participating schools will be trained in the use of this intervention.
- All schools, parents and project partners will be offered a summary of the findings, once the project is complete.



For more details please visit the LIVELY website.

The interventions:

This research project, funded by the Heather van der Lely Foundation, aims to evaluate the effectiveness of language

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interventions for children with language difficulties, by randomly allocating schools to one of three groups:

- Building Early Sentences Therapy (BEST) was developed by Newcastle University in partnership with speech and language therapists and has promising early signs of effectiveness.
- The Derbyshire Language Scheme (DLS) has been used widely for many years but has had limited formal evaluation. The study will use an adapted version of this scheme.
- 'Continued Classroom support' (CCS) where children will continue to access the usual language support provided by schools. Schools in this group will be offered one of the above interventions after the project's data collection is complete.

It is not currently possible to say which of these approaches is the most effective and this is the main question of this research.

Schools will be randomly allocated to one of the three groups: BEST, DLS or CCS. Teachers will then be asked to identify children who are failing to meet expected language targets and who may benefit from a language intervention. Parents will be invited to participate in the project and asked to sign a consent form.



After baseline assessments are conducted to confirm children's eligibility for the project, researchers will deliver the interventions to the BEST and DLS groups. Researchers will work with teaching assistants from the schools to provide two intervention sessions a week for eight weeks. Each session will last about 30 minutes.

After the 8 weeks when interventions are

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delivered to children in BEST or DLS schools, the researchers will assess all children again. A third assessment will be conducted about 2-3 months later. This process will be repeated over three waves.

Working in partnership:

We hope to work in partnership with NHS Trusts and Local Authority Speech and Language teams in in the North East. We hope that these partners will act as gatekeepers to schools, and will help to identify eligible children likely to benefit from participating in the research.

We aim to recruit 24 schools and work with children in their Nursery and Reception classes who are not reaching expectations in their language development. Children will be aged 3 years 5 months and 4 years 5 months, be a monolingual speaker of English/English as main language, score at or below the 16th centile on a standardised play based language assessment and have the ability to participate in a small group learning context.

What to do next:

If you need any more information please visit the project website or contact the project coordinator, Dr Christine Jack, to discuss how we can work in partnership:

Email: christine.jack@newcastle.ac.uk

Telephone: 0191 208 3503

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