Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Consultants

Second instalment
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Guidance for Early Language Consultants: second instalment

Introduction
Welcome to the second instalment of the guidance for Early Language Consultants (ELCs). This set of materials focuses on the ways in which you will be working with settings and early years practitioners to improve the quality of early language provision. By this stage, you will have already established working relationships with the Early Language Lead Practitioners (ELLPs) and will have gained a good understanding of their own strengths and areas for development, as well as those of the targeted settings.

Increasingly, you will be tailoring your support and training to meet the particular needs of individuals and the contexts in which they work. The guidance which follows will help you to:

• understand the theory and rationale behind models of continuing professional development (CPD) and how to bring about changes in practice effectively
• plan and implement demonstration or modelling sessions
• plan and deliver cluster meeting 2
• understand the research and rationale behind implementing specific language activities
• support practitioners in making the most of everyday activities to promote language development
• monitor the impact of your work and progress at child and setting levels.

Improving the quality of early language provision

Supporting the continuing professional development of practitioners in Every Child a Talker (ECAT) settings
As described in the first instalment of the Guidance for Early Years Consultants (EYCs), the majority of the ELC’s time must be spent working directly with practitioners to improve the quality of early language provision in the targeted settings. This will be achieved through supporting the CPD of the practitioners, particularly the ELLP. Continuing professional development will take many forms and ELCs will need to offer the benefits of a mixed approach to CPD in order to effect real changes in practice. Joyce and Showers (2002), identified two interlinked aspects of successful CPD:

• providing opportunities to enable people to learn new skills and knowledge
• transferring those skills and knowledge and using them in practice.
The transfer of skills and knowledge into practice is the most challenging aspect of the ELC’s role. Research suggests that a professional development programme that tries to instigate such changes needs to take into account the individual needs, motivation and expectations of practitioners. Changes need to be rooted in evidence, the practitioners involved need to believe that the changes are of value and be involved in deciding how the changes should take place. (See Cluster meeting 1 powerpoint presentation – Implementing change.)

Research into effective CPD suggests that this can only be achieved by a combination of specialist input and training, demonstration or modelling, mentoring and peer-coaching. The Communication, Language and Literacy development (CLLD) website, Initial Teacher Training (ITT) section: www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld contains a selection of research papers for further reading.

Joyce and Showers (2002)¹ found that the following four components, used together, gave the best results for improving knowledge and skills and transferring them to practice.

1 *Knowledge*: this includes an understanding of theory and rationale behind a new strategy.

2 *Demonstration or modelling* as a key aspect of specialist coaching: this greatly helps the learner to understand the theory as it shows how to put the principles into practice.

3 *Practice of the skill* under simulated conditions: practising a skill in realistic conditions helps the transfer of knowledge.

4 *Peer-coaching*: this collaborative work in a setting helps to solve the problems or questions that arise during implementation.

The four components of this model can be successfully adopted and used in ECAT. Each of these is explored in detail below.

1 **Knowledge**

The ELLPs will be supported to develop an understanding of the theory and rationale behind ECAT and the development of speech, language and communication skills in a variety of ways. They will, for example:

- attend cluster meetings and other training events

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¹ *Student achievement through staff development, 3rd ed.* Joyce, B. & Showers, B. Copyright © 2002 by ASCD. Adapted with permission. Learn more about ASCD at www.ascd.org.
• reflect on their current practice by completing the audits and self-evaluation of their existing skills and knowledge and identify areas for training and development

• use the practitioner guidance to help them to understand, for example, the importance of effective communicative behaviours, the features of communication-friendly settings and why and how they should be implementing the suggested daily activities

• develop their knowledge of how early language develops and the importance of parental engagement

• use the expertise of the ELC to help them to understand the theory and develop their knowledge.

2 Demonstration or modelling

Researchers are agreed that providing resources alone is unlikely to lead to changes in practice. Practitioners need to be supported to implement their new knowledge in their own contexts. In order successfully to change the practice in a setting, as an ELC you will need to act as a specialist coach, facilitating changes in practice in a variety of ways and supporting ELLPs as they try out their new skills in their settings.

The role of a specialist coach involves providing activities that promote and enhance the development of a specific aspect of teaching and learning or leadership practice, including demonstrating, observing, articulating and discussing practice to raise awareness.

Adey, Hewitt, Hewitt and Landua (The Professional Development of Teachers: Practice and Theory) found that:

Coaching allows teachers to share their practice, ideas, fears, difficulties and errors so the process of change becomes less frightening. It needs to take place over an extended period of time and it is not sufficient for a coach to ‘drop in’ to a school, observe a lesson, make some encouraging comments and move on. A series of coaching sessions that may include the coach, for example, open questioning or wait time, generating activity from all students, promotes a process of conceptual change which reshapes the teachers’ implicit knowledge which, in turn, gradually changes the teachers’ behaviour.

A review of the impact of collaborative CPD suggests that having the support of an external expert can have positive effects on professional development. A comparative study (Saxe et al., 2001) found that a group of teachers who had received input from an external ‘expert’ made significantly more changes and their pupils shared greater increases in attainment than a group that only used peer support.

A full version of the review (The impact of collaborative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on classroom teaching and learning, by Philippa Cordingley, Miranda Bell, Barbara Rundell and Donald Evans) can be found on the ITT section of the CLLD website. This review focuses on teachers working in schools but the principles are transferable to early years settings.

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ECAT Guidance for Consultants | Second instalment

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Demonstrating or modelling of good practice that can be observed by the learner and then discussed and analysed afterwards has many advantages. It is accepted learning theory that the more active participation and sensory involvement there is by the learner, the more effective learning will be. When you model an activity or an effective method of using language with the children, practitioners will see, hear and experience the event in a real-life context. It will help you to present ideas and concepts more clearly and will reinforce learning.

Observing demonstration sessions and being involved in coaching will be useful for ELLPs, as it will serve as a non-threatening introduction to the process that they will eventually be using themselves to develop colleagues’ practice in their own and the linked setting.

You should complete demonstration or modelling sessions in settings, remembering that effective professional development activities should:

• be directly relevant to participants
• have clearly intended and identified outcomes
• take into account previous knowledge and expertise
• have an agreed method of evaluating the impact on practice.

The checklist diagram on the next page, and the notes that follow it, illustrate what needs to be considered when providing a demonstration or modelling session.
Demonstration or modelling

Have you agreed with the ELLP the specific focus, purpose and outcome of the demonstration?

Is it directly relevant to the participants?

Children

Does the planned activity take into account children’s ages, abilities, interests and previous experiences?

Practitioners

Are you pitching the activity at the correct level? Does it take into account previous knowledge and expertise?

Have you used resources that are realistically available to the setting?

Is the demonstration context into account and making it relevant to the practitioners?

Have you agreed a suitable time?

Is the ELLP going to be free to observe the demonstration?

Is there time allocated for discussion after the demonstration?

Have you decided on the next steps?

How will the ELLP take the learning forward?

Have you discussed evaluating impact on practice?
Have you agreed with the ELLP the specific focus, purpose and outcome of the demonstration?

The developmental needs of each setting and ELLP will be different. After completing the audits of existing practice and some observation of practice in the setting, you should complete an individual action plan with the ELLP. The action plan should include details of the demonstration or modelling sessions that you will provide that term.

Every demonstration or modelling session should have a specific focus, purpose and identified outcome that has been agreed with the ELLP before the session takes place. The content of a demonstration session will vary. It may involve the ELC setting up a specific activity with a small group of children. Alternatively, it may involve the ELLP observing the ELC during a short period of time as they demonstrate some techniques that give children opportunities to use their language during their play activities, such as waiting longer for responses, narrating children’s play or using open questions. The ELLPs should be clear about the specific aspect of practice on which they are focusing as they observe the demonstration.

Some ELLPs may find it helpful to be given a simple observation record sheet. For example, if an ELLP needed support to develop aspects of their communicative behaviours, you could ask the ELLP to focus on a couple of aspects of effective communication, completing the observation record sheet, as you work with a group of children. You can then use this sheet as a prompt in your feedback discussion after the activity. It will also help you to ascertain the ELLP’s understanding.

Planning a demonstration session thoroughly with an ELLP will model for them how they should plan future demonstration sessions that they may provide for the other practitioners. It will also help them to understand the benefits of peer-coaching, which is introduced in cluster meeting 2.

Sample observation of a demonstration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asking open questions</td>
<td>Practitioners can be asked to note here some examples as evidence and these can be discussed after the demonstration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners can add supportive notes here, such as; ‘Questions that need more than a yes or no answer’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model and encourage good listening</td>
<td>‘Keep eye contact, respond positively.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is the demonstration session directly relevant to the participants?

This includes both children and practitioners.

**Children**

Make sure that the group includes a mix of children, with a range of language levels. In this way, you can show practitioners how you respond effectively and sensitively to children at different levels of language and ensure that every child takes part in the conversation.

- Does the planned activity take into account children’s ages, abilities, interests and previous experiences?
- Will the children find the activity interesting and relevant to them?
- Have you discussed with the ELLP the children’s interests, language levels and abilities?

**Practitioners**

Make sure that you have gathered information from practitioners’ completed audits and self-evaluations, and/or completed the universal stage of the *Speech, Language and Communication Framework* (SLCF) that will allow you to pitch the demonstration at the correct level for them.

- Will this demonstration support them to deepen their level of understanding and knowledge?
- Will it be an activity that they can understand, relate to and use to develop their own practice? For example, if you are considering demonstrating dialogic book-reading, it may be useful to observe a story session to see how the ELLP reflects on a story with children: do they ask open-ended questions, do they use real objects, does the ELLP introduce the new vocabulary? If not, you may need to do some preparatory work before considering a dialogic book-reading demonstration.
- Is it relevant to their circumstances and situation? For example, a playgroup operating in a village hall may have more limited space and resources than a purpose-built nursery; a childminder will be working within a very different context. Is the demonstration taking the context into account and making it relevant to the practitioners?
- Have you used resources that are realistically available to the setting and are you demonstrating what can be achieved by using them effectively?

**Have you agreed a suitable time for the demonstration session?**

This may seem like a simple thing to organise but in a very busy setting it is important that the time is agreed with the ELLP well in advance. You need to
be confident that the ELLP will be able to focus on the activity and will not be called away halfway through the demonstration. In some circumstances it will be necessary to arrange with the ELLP to have extra help in the setting at this time. Remember that time will be needed for feedback, too, and this should be agreed in advance.

Is the time agreed suitable for the children, too? It should fit in with the children’s routine, not, for example, added on as an extra activity when the rest of the group are outside or getting ready for lunch.

**Have you agreed on the next steps?**

It is important that the demonstration leads to changes and improvements in practice, so the follow-up is very important.

**How will the ELLP take this learning forward?**

A discussion should take place as soon as possible after the demonstration. Discussions should cover:

- what was observed
- how this differs from existing practice
- how changes can be made to practice
- how the ELLP will implement any necessary changes in the setting, including the development and support of the other practitioners in the setting

You need to feel confident that the ELLP has understood the purpose of the demonstration and that their learning has been reinforced.

**Have you agreed on a method of evaluating the impact on practice?**

How will you know that changes have been made? You should agree a method for this. For example, will peer observations take place, will the ELLP model the practice, will videos of practice be made? How will the impact on the children’s learning be measured? This may be a part of the procedures used for reviewing progress at child and setting level.

**Scenario**

The ELLP and ELC have discussed the ways in which story-time is conducted in a private day nursery. They have identified that this is an area for development as practitioners often read stories quite quickly and their questions following the story rarely require more than one-word answers. The ELC demonstrates some of the resources that are available to support the development of this area, such as:
They agree that the ELLP will spend some time working through these resources and the ELC will provide a demonstration session on how to share a book with a group of young children. They agree that the focus will be on sharing a picture book, without necessarily reading the whole story. The ELLP observes the session and afterwards the ELLP and the ECP discuss the types of question that were used. Then the ELC suggests that the ELLP chooses some books and reflects on the types of questioning that could be used with them, before using them with groups of children.

On the next visit, the ELLP feeds back that although it was difficult at first to try to think of what to say, the more practice she has the easier it seems to be. Other practitioners have been observing her story sessions and she is encouraging them to try the technique themselves. They have agreed to set up some observation sessions so that they can support each other to develop this skill.

Case study

Jill, the ELC, has been working with a private day nursery. The nursery has received a good Ofsted judgement and the local authority Early Years Consultant (EYC) working with the nursery reports that overall their practice is effective. The ELLP, Shazia, has completed the setting-based audit and the universal SLCF and has reflected on her practice and the practice within the setting. Shazia discusses with Jill her concerns that she and many of the other practitioners seem to ask too many questions such as: ‘How many are there?’ and ‘What colour is it?’ when working with the children. They all know that it is important to talk to the children and have discussed using more open questions, but she and the other practitioners are unsure how to do that.

Some of the practitioners feel concerned that they need to ask this type of question because part of their job is to help children to learn the names of colours, shapes and numbers. Jill and Shazia discuss the way forward and decide that it is important that they focus on children’s language development more widely, building on children’s interests and understanding. Practitioners should be helped to understand the reasons why they should change their practice and agree that they need to focus their work for the coming half-term...
on developing effective communicative behaviours. They decide on the following actions.

- Shazia will work through the Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Positive relationships section, using both the DVD-ROM and the booklet. Jill also provides her with some other useful material to help her to reflect on open questioning and other effective behaviours.

- Jill and Shazia arrange a date and time for Jill to do a demonstration session, particularly focusing on giving children time to respond, narrating children’s play and asking open questions. They decide that the most effective way to demonstrate this would be for Jill to join in with the children’s free-choice playtime towards the end of the morning and for Jill then to take a small group of the older children for a story at the end of the session. At the end of the morning session, Shazia will be free to discuss the demonstration with Jill.

- Jill and Shazia discuss the best way for Shazia to record what she is observing. They agree that Shazia will compile a table listing the things that Jill will try to demonstrate and will make notes about what she has observed. They will look at this together before Jill begins working with the children and Jill will point out some of the things on which Shazia can particularly focus.

- Jill talks to Shazia about the types of story that interest the children and those that will have been read to them recently. She agrees to use a book that belongs to the setting, as Shazia thinks that would be useful for her to talk through what Jill did with the rest of the staff, giving examples of the comments or questions that Jill used.

- When Jill arrives to do the demonstration, Shazia has arranged for supply cover so that she can be released to observe the session and discuss it afterwards.

3 Practising a skill

Throughout the ECAT programme ELLPs should be given time and opportunities to practise the skills that they have learnt. This may be under simulated conditions, if necessary, but it is more likely to take place in their settings under realistic conditions. However, there may be occasions, for example when introducing new aspects of the programme such as dialogic book reading, when ELLPs feel happier trying out the technique with the support of their peers, perhaps at a cluster meeting.
You can offer support by observing ELLPs in their settings and encouraging them as they try out new skills. You may also need to support them by ensuring that the leader or manager of the setting is aware of the time commitment required for practising the new skills and that the ELLP has sufficient release time to embed the new learning, whether that be in your own setting or by working with another setting. Note that ECAT funding is designed to be used for purposes such as this, including peer-coaching. Peer-coaching offers good opportunities for ELLPs to practise skills with the encouragement and support of colleagues.

4 Peer-coaching

You will be acting as both a coach and mentor to the ELLPs who, in turn, will gradually take on these roles of coach and mentor to their colleagues in their settings. The ELLPs will be introduced to peer-coaching in cluster meeting 2 and should be encouraged and supported to introduce this practice into their settings.

What are the benefits of peer-coaching?

Research suggests that practitioners learn most from a combination of support from their peers and specialist support. Peer-coaching encourages professional communication and helps practitioners to develop a ‘shared language’ about teaching and learning.

This is especially important when new strategies are being introduced, as in ECAT. Joyce and Showers (2002)\(^3\) suggest that practitioners who take part in coaching:

- practise new strategies more often and develop greater skills as a result – they get support and encouragement from colleagues
- use new strategies more appropriately – they discuss objectives and think through how to apply new strategies, they have the confidence to experiment
- remember the knowledge base and retain the skills involved in the new strategy – using the skills helps their memory
- understand the purposes and uses of the new strategies better – they use them in new situations.

They found that practitioners who used peer-support for observations, mutual problem solving and collaborative planning were more successful in transferring new skills to their practice. Early years practitioners are constantly being encouraged to become more reflective in their work; peer-coaching is a

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\(^3\) *Student achievement through staff development, 3rd ed.* Joyce, B. & Showers, B. Copyright © 2002 by ASCD. Adapted with permission. Learn more about ASCD at www.ascd.org.
way of reflecting on the practice in your setting, thinking about your skills and the skills of others and becoming mutually supportive.

Like all professional processes, peer-coaching is most successful when practitioners adapt it to their own needs and circumstances. It puts practitioners in control of their own professional development, allowing them to ‘start from where they are’. Many practitioners who have tried it have found it adds to their job satisfaction and can renew their enthusiasm for their job.

Peer-coaching offers a means by which practitioners can deepen their awareness and understanding of:

• what goes on in their settings
• their effectiveness as practitioners
• their own and the children’s learning.

**Peer-coaching in a pre-school playgroup**

The pre-school leader studied some research on the benefits of peer-coaching while completing her early years degree. She discussed introducing it with the staff and management committee and, although the staff felt a little uneasy at first about observing and commenting on each others’ practice, they decided to try it, but agreed on some principles.

• Peer-coaching is to help to share practice among staff and embed new knowledge or skills into our practice.
• The focus of the peer observations will be mutually agreed.
• Peer-coaching observations are kept quite separate from performance management systems.
• The purpose of the observation has to be made quite clear.
• It is an equal, non-judgemental partnership and staff can choose their observation partner, any notes made stay with the person being observed.
• Everyone must be given time to take part in observations and discussions afterwards.

*An example of how this worked in this setting*  

*Focus:* Turn-taking in speaking during a group activity (A practitioner had attended the Communicating Matters course and was reflecting on the opportunities that she gave children to speak during activities.)

*Observation:* activity – children in a group preparing fruit for snack (The observer’s task is to note the number of turns the practitioner and children
have at speaking, examples of what the practitioner says and some children’s contributions.)

**Discussion:** The observer noted that during the activity the practitioner had 35 turns and the children had 25. However, the children’s utterances were much shorter than the practitioner’s; the practitioner asked closed questions on many occasions and in two instances did not give the children time to answer before speaking again.

The practitioner commented: ‘I was quite surprised by this, I thought that I was talking too much but I thought that I was quite good at open questions and waiting time, but I now realise that they are two areas I need to consider again.’

**Follow up:** Both agreed that the observation had been useful. The practitioner decided that she would reflect on her practice and try to ask more open questions. She decided that when she was going to be involved in a planned activity she would spend some time thinking about the things that she could say. Both thought that the leader of the group was already more skilled at asking open questions and that they would arrange a time to observe and talk to her about her practice.

Peer-coaching is still developing in the playgroup, but the pre-school leader is pleased with the positive results. She says: ‘It’s certainly developed good professional relationships between the staff. We got on well before, but more like friends, this is helping us to talk more about our practice and to begin to say things like “that’s an area I need to work on.” I can already see some changes in practice. I think that the most important aspects of making this work successfully are staff trusting each other and me being supportive as a leader.’

A practitioner says: ‘I didn’t think that this would have any benefits for me at first, but now I am starting to enjoy it! It has made my job more interesting as I am thinking more about how I work with the children and I have already started to notice the difference it is making to some of them. They are much more talkative and keep on taking the lead in the conversation! It’s easy to get stuck in a rut and think that you are doing O.K. It’s good to share things that you know you do well with others and to learn from watching the others at work- you don’t often get time to do that in a session here. I think that it helps to plan the training that you need too- instead of just thinking yes I’ll go on that course, I’m thinking about the specific areas I could do with some training in’.

With your support, ELLPs will be responsible for helping all practitioners in their settings and in their linked settings to improve their skills to support children’s communication development. Settings should be encouraged to become collaborative learning communities. Practitioners should be
supporting each other to develop their skills and knowledge; peer-coaching is an important aspect of this.

**Recommended reading**

The *A to Z of peer coaching*, which is based on lessons from a three-year pilot of peer-coaching, led by the National Union of Teachers (NUT), sets out some principles and provides frameworks which help to translate those principles into practice. A useful adapted version of this can be found on the ITT section of the CLLD website [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld)

It will be helpful to use this document as guidance when facilitating peer-coaching.

**How can ELCs facilitate peer-coaching in ECAT settings?**

The first step must be for the ELC to feel confident in their own ability to support settings to implement peer-coaching. *The National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching*, Skills for Mentoring and Coaching available from [http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld) will help you to consider your own skills and the processes involved in mentoring and coaching. Think about these questions.

• Are you able to observe, analyse and reflect upon professional practice and make this explicit?

• Do you listen actively, accommodating and valuing silence, concentrating on what’s actually being said and using affirming body language to signal attention?

• Can you replay what’s been said using some of the same words to reinforce, value and reframe thinking?

• Do you model expertise in practice and through conversation?

The CLLD website (as above) has guidance that will support you. It includes topics such as ‘Encouraging dialogue and asking questions’ and ‘Selecting a focus for peer coaching’.

As ELC, you should support ELLPs to introduce peer-coaching. Remember that this will be a new and unfamiliar role for many ELLPs and it will be useful for them to take their lead from you. It will be important to reiterate to ELLPs that peer-coaching is not a management tool to be used to assess practitioners’ capability, but is a mutually supportive, non-hierarchical process.

The following points may be helpful when you are trying to facilitate peer-coaching; use the *A to Z of peer coaching* as further guidance.
• **Principles:** support ELLPs to agree a set of principles with the managers and practitioners in the setting. Everyone involved in the process should be clear about the aims, procedures and outcomes.

• **Focus:** ensure that ELLPs understand the need for a clear focus to peer-observations, these should be linked to their action plan; it may be useful to complete a pre-observation agreement.

• **Observation:** ELLPs will have observed you and should be able to support other practitioners as they begin to observe each other. There should be a clear method of recording what is observed and agreement about what happens to the information collected.

• **Discussion:** again ELLPs will be used to taking part in good-quality professional dialogue, as they will discuss issues with you after observations. Support them by giving examples of the types of question that are suitable, they can share these with practitioners (use the *A to Z of peer coaching* materials for guidance).

• **Follow-up:** the process should be reviewed and participants should be discussing what they have learnt, how the process went and what the next steps will be.

**Cluster meetings**

**Cluster Meeting 1:**
The purpose of cluster meeting 1 is to introduce ELLPs to ECAT and, in particular, to focus on their work with parents in supporting children’s early language development. The content for cluster meeting 1 is provided with this guidance and includes comprehensive presenter’s notes.

**Cluster Meeting 2:**
The tasks and format of this meeting should be adapted to meet the needs of specific groups. You may not be able to cover all of the content described here in one session. Choose those aspects that are most relevant to your local needs. You may want to come back to other aspects at a later stage.

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<tr>
<th>Cluster meeting 2</th>
<th>Aims and overview</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aims and overview</strong></td>
<td>This session aims to:</td>
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<td>• review priorities and identify common training needs</td>
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<td>• introduce the features of communication-friendly settings</td>
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<td>• introduce effective communicative behaviours</td>
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<td>• familiarise ELLPs with the concept of coaching</td>
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<td>• review the introduction of ECAT to parents and discuss how to</td>
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work effectively with parents
• familiarise ELLPs with existing documents and resources

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<th>Resources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Collate any materials produced by the LA for the areas to be covered in the session.</td>
<td>Collate National Strategy and other resources for the areas to be covered, including:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• video clips from the Inclusion Development Programme, (DCSF ref 00215-2008BKT-EN) Letters and Sounds (DCSF ref 00113-2008 PCK-EN)</td>
<td>• EYFS guidance on EAL (DCSF ref 00683-2007BKT-EN) and Raising Boys’ Achievements (DCSF ref 00682_2007BKT-EN), Inclusion Development Programme booklet as above</td>
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<td>• Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs, DCSF publication (00215-2008BKT-EN) – the DVD-ROM shows practitioners explaining how they work closely with parents</td>
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<td>• Foundation Stage Parents: Partners in Learning, DfES publication (1210-2005-G), case studies of effective practice</td>
<td>• Parents as Partners in Early Learning PPEL, DCSF publication (00672-2007 POS-EN), ‘Height chart’ to use with parents</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk">www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk</a> provides interesting information and resources for parents</td>
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<td>• Consultant file, instalment 2, Appendix 2</td>
<td>• A–Z of peer coaching from CLLD website <a href="http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld">http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld</a></td>
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</table>

Before the session
Ask ELLPs to bring completed audits.
Order resources from Prolog if necessary.

During the meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review priorities and identify common training needs</th>
<th>Small-group tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Review the content of the existing training audits. List the most useful training that has been attended and say why it was useful. Consider how the training impacted on practice. Give feedback to the whole group.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discuss experiences of using the SLCF and list positive or surprising results. List training and support needs that have been identified by individuals. Give feedback to the whole group.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask ELLPs to highlight and note common identified needs for future training and support, and any immediate priorities that have been identified.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suggest that ELLPs begin to formulate an action plan for their</td>
<td>• Suggest that ELLPs begin to formulate an action plan for their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Introduce the features of communication-friendly settings | **Small-group task**  
Ask the groups to consider how communication-friendly their settings are.  
1 Put together a group definition of what a communication-friendly setting should be like.  
2 List some features of a communication-friendly setting.  
**Feedback**  
Feedback should ensure that the following main points are covered.  
1 Definition  
A setting that is communication-friendly should be able to communicate with all the children, parents, visitors and staff, including those with additional needs, those learning English and those with basic skills needs.  
2 Features  
*Environment, both physical and emotional*: a supportive environment that encourages and enables children to use their speech language and communication skills.  
Point out how features can relate to EYFS principles (as in the practitioner handbook).  
*Unique child*: every child's needs will be considered; look at the environment from the child's point of view. Is the level of speech, language and communication used appropriate for each child?  
*Positive relationships*: with children, with parents between practitioners, with other professionals.  
*The importance of the role of the adult and their effective communication skills is covered more in the next task.*  
*Enabling environments*: the physical environment is well planned, both inside and outside, having quiet areas, areas to explore, with things to talk about etc.  
*Emotional*: the children are supported and encouraged to use their language by responsive, positive adults.  
*What does the environment say to parents? how welcoming is it to all parents?*  
*Learning and development*: there are planned opportunities for the development of speech, language and communication; practitioners should consider elements of these as they are planning either routine activities, such as snacks, creative activities, or activities that are specifically planned to develop language. This involves considering the needs and developmental levels of the children as well as aspects such as specific vocabulary development.  
Use a selection of resources to illustrate these points, either showing some examples video or introducing the resources to the ELLPs. Refer to the EYFS guidance on EAL and Raising Boys’ Achievements, Inclusion Development Programme booklet, or materials produced within the LA. NB references for these can
be found in Instalment 1 of the ELC guidance.

Point out that the Practitioner file will help them to consider further practice, for example, the Audit of language provision in settings in the Practitioner file helps ELLPs to evaluate their setting and the section called Features of communication-friendly settings gives useful information.

**Introduce effective communicative behaviours**

Reinforce the role that practitioners play in the development of speech, language and communication. (NB: A number of practitioners do not know how speech, language and communication are different; it may be necessary to establish this here.)

In small groups, practitioners complete the quiz (Appendix 1). Add extra questions that are relevant to your specific group. Make it fun. During feedback, expand on the answers given by ELLPs and ensure that they have at least a basic understanding of what we mean by speech, language and communication. If necessary, additional training or other CPD support may be offered. This activity will help you to assess ELLPs’ knowledge.

**Familiarise ELLPs with the concept of coaching**

At this point, mention to ELLPs that they may have identified some aspects of speech, language and communication development with which they feel that they need some support. Explain your role and that you will support them in their development by acting as a mentor and a coach.

The National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching on the CLLD website (www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld) gives the following useful definitions.

- **Mentoring**: a structured, sustained process for supporting professional learners through significant career transitions. (A professional learner is someone tackling a new or particularly challenging stage in their professional development, who seeks out or is directed towards mentoring.)

- **Specialist coaching**: a structured, sustained process for enabling the development of a specific aspect of a professional learner’s practice.

- **Collaborative co-coaching**: a structured, sustained process between two or more professional learners to enable them to embed new knowledge and skills from specialist sources in day-to-day practice; in ECAT this is called peer-coaching.

Explain these definitions and that, in ECAT, you will act as a mentor and a specialist coach to ELLPs and they, in turn, will act in all three of these roles with the practitioners with whom they will work.

Briefly explain that research has demonstrated that this method of supporting development has been proved to be useful. (Some groups may want more specific research details; in this case, refer them to the CLLD website www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld)

The most important aspects of development are gaining new knowledge and skills and then transferring those skills and using them in their practice.

Refer ELLPs to their audit of training.

**Task**
In small groups, discuss briefly courses that ELLPs may have attended that were interesting on the day but that did not change their practice. Then discuss courses that did impact on practice and what the difference was.

**Peer-coaching**

Explain the process of peer-coaching and ask for examples from practitioners who have been involved.

You may wish to refer to the case study in the Practitioner file as an example, or use examples of successful practice in schools and settings within your own LA.

Refer to the *A to Z of peer coaching*, and share principles and common agreements with the ELLPs.

**Task**

In small groups, discuss how you could introduce peer-coaching into your setting. Consider:

- who needs to be consulted before peer-coaching can be introduced in your setting
- what the barriers might be and how these may be overcome
- what extra knowledge or skills you will need to develop to support the introduction of peer-coaching successfully.

Take feedback and ask ELLPs to begin the process of introducing peer-coaching by thinking about their training and support needs and discussing these with you as a further part of the review of training. (It may be necessary to provide additional specific training sessions.)

**Review the introduction of ECAT to parents and introduce how to work effectively with parents**

Ask for feedback from ELLPs who have already introduced ECAT to parents. Ask how the parents responded. Seek examples of ELLPs’ reflections about relationships with parents and any changes made in their practice since cluster meeting 1.

Point out that, although it sometimes seems difficult to work with parents, when these parents are effectively involved they can take approaches that practitioners are using in their settings into their homes, to the benefit of the children. Ask practitioners whether they may have under-estimated the contribution that can be made by parents and the importance of partnership working with them. Discuss responses.

**Task (from the Practitioner file)**

*Barriers to parental engagement*

Barriers to parental engagement will be different for each parent and within each setting. As a group, spend some time thinking about the possible reasons why parents that practitioners work with may not be fully engaged.

Raise the following questions during feedback.

- Is it because parents are working full-time and cannot visit the setting during the working day?
- Is it because they are unaware of the importance of communication as a foundational skill and how and when it develops?
- Do they underestimate the important role that they play, or even devalue their own role in comparison to the role of...
‘professionals’?
It is useful to think of these three steps in work with parents.

*Step 1: Informed and enthused* – parents need be encouraged to understand the value and importance of supporting and developing their children’s communication skills. Raising awareness and sharing enthusiasm, as well as informing parents about activities and achievements within the setting and sharing knowledge and ideas are simple ways to begin engaging parents.

*Step 2: Consulted and valued* – parents know their children best and they possess a wealth of knowledge about their own children’s communication skills, as well as opinions about what and how a setting can best provide for their children. Providing opportunities for parents to share this knowledge in ways that value their opinion will further increase engagement.

*Step 3: Engaged partners* – parents who are fully empowered and engaged not only consult and comment on what is best for their children, but are confident pro-active partners alongside practitioners, supporting their children to develop speech, language and communication skills at home, in the early years setting and elsewhere.

**Task**
Ask ELLPs to begin to think about the three steps and how their settings
- inform and enthuse
- consult and value
- engage parents, both mothers and fathers.
List some of the ways in which this happens.
Take feedback. Point out examples of good practice and mention that the Practitioner file will support ELLPs to consider and discuss this with the practitioners in their setting.
Discuss resources with the group.
**Appendix 1**

**Quiz**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spend ten minutes discussing the following questions with your group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you model good listening skills?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you make sure that you are giving children enough time to respond when you talk to them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you adapt your language to meet the children’s needs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give some examples of open questions as you can.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give some examples of non verbal communication as you can.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improving the quality of early language provision

Benefits of providing young children with opportunities to engage with an adult in specific language-focused activities

In the next instalment of the Practitioner guidance, early language lead practitioners (ELLPs) will be provided with examples of specific language activities that will support language learning. This paper describes the research and the rationale behind implementing specific activities and it will help you to pave the way for the introduction of this type of approach in settings.

A brief summary of some recent research

The need for specific activities

A significant number of children now start school with reduced levels of proficiency in oral language. Children are exposed to different degrees of quality of oral language before entering early years settings and these differences are linked to later language skills. Both homes and classrooms where children receive frequent examples of language models are reported to enhance language development.

Early years settings provide children with a range of activities and opportunities that could enhance their oral language skills. Unfortunately, some children choose not to access these opportunities and some activities do not provide children with exposure to adult language that supports the children’s developing language skills. For example, adult language that focuses on controlling behaviour or organising activities is associated with restricted and less complex language use by the children. Importantly, relatively large doses of high-quality language input are required to accelerate language development in pre-school settings. Good oral language input is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is therefore important to ensure that all children have regular access to experiences where the focus is on developing their oral language activities. These activities should be enjoyable and age appropriate. These might be games, story activities or discussions. The critical factor is the nature of the adult’s talk. Talk should be child-centred (about what a child is doing), semantically contingent (repeating the content of what the child has said) and embedded in familiar interactive routines or scripts.

Some key features of language facilitation techniques used across research studies

- Following the child’s lead and commenting on the child’s object of interest, for example, ‘Oh, look, the water’s nearly filled the bucket.’
• Following the child’s lead and commenting on the child’s current activity, for example, ‘You’re pouring the sugar into the bowl. Now you’re stirring it up.’

• Asking open questions related to the child’s interests, for example, ‘What’s the little boy doing in the sandpit?’

• Responding to what the child says by providing a little more information, for example, the child says, ‘I helped make the gingerbread man.’ You add, ‘Yes, you put the currants in for his eyes, didn’t you.’

• Waiting for the child to prepare and give their response.

Types of specific activities with benefits validated by research evidence

1 Interactions around picture books: dialogic book reading

• The work of Whitehurst and colleagues

In one study (Whitehurst, Falco, Lonigan, Fischel, de Farshe, Valda-Menchaca and Caulfield, 1988), parents of two-year-olds were randomly assigned to two groups. All parents were from mid- to high-Socio-Economic Status (SES) families, and all read to their children frequently. One group of parents was given two 30-minute training sessions in their own homes; one group was not trained but read to their children as often as the trained group. Trained parents were significantly better at using language facilitation techniques, praised their children more and made the interaction more fun. Children of trained parents advanced their language skills by six months in the six weeks following parental training, and differences between children of trained and untrained parents were still apparent nine months later.

Whitehurst and associates extended these findings of the value of dialogic book-reading in later studies with three-year-old children from low-SES families (Whitehurst et al, 1994; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998) and showed that if dialogic book reading took place in both the child’s home and their day-care setting the beneficial effects on the child’s language skills were greater.

Studies by other research teams (for example, Dale, Crane-Thoresen, Notari-Syverson and Cole, 1996; Hargrave and Senechal, 2000) have

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shown that dialogic book-reading also benefits children with delayed language development.

• *The work of Wasik and colleagues*\(^5\)

In one study (Wasik, Bond and Hindman, 2006), Wasik and colleagues extended their previous work, which had shown that pre-school children’s language development benefited from training given to their teachers in dialogic book-reading (Wasik and Bond, 2001). In the 2006 study, teachers working in Headstart centres with over 200 two- to five-year-old children were trained in dialogic book-reading around a theme (for example, gardening), use of props to introduce new vocabulary relevant to the theme (in this example, seeds, a trowel, a rake, insects, flowers) and use of creative and other small-group activities designed to allow children to hear and use the new vocabulary in natural conversation, in an intervention that lasted nine months. Trainers modelled techniques (for example, ways of introducing new vocabulary, ways of commenting on what a child is doing, ways of asking open-ended questions, learning to listen and wait for the child to respond, ways of acknowledging and expanding on the child’s response) for the teachers, who were then observed practising these techniques, and given constructive feedback. At the end of the intervention, children’s receptive and expressive language showed large gains in standard scores (the children made accelerated progress), and improved significantly more than children in the control group. These results therefore provide strong evidence that teachers can be trained to interact with children in ways that substantially increase children’s vocabulary. The ways in which teachers talked with and listened to children also changed as a result of the training they’d received, with more continuing and beneficial use of the language facilitation techniques they had been taught.

2 *Interactions around picture books: dialogic story talk*

Dockrell, Stuart and King (2006)\(^6\) designed and implemented a set of small-group activities, including a dialogic story-talk activity using picture books. In this activity, the book was used as a starting point for talking with and listening to children, with practitioners trained through modelling and feedback in the language-facilitation techniques described above. Practitioners encouraged the children to talk through what was happening in each picture and relate this to events and circumstances in their own lives and experience. This set of activities also had beneficial effects on the children’s vocabulary and supported the children in producing longer utterances.

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\(^6\) Dockrell, J., Stuart, M. & King, D. Supporting oral language skills in the early years. Literacy Today.
3 Activities offering good opportunities to develop language: dramatic role-play

In developing a program of specific activities with the practitioner focusing on language, Rice, Bunce and colleagues (Rice and Wilcox, 1995; Bunce, 1995) start from the view that⁷:

...language skills are often overlooked as a specific part of a child's pre-school experiences...Our perspective is that the area of language warrants special emphasis, which need not be at the expense of the other traditional curricular goals and can be interwoven into many aspects of the curriculum. This special emphasis will be beneficial to all pre-school children, but especially so for children with language limitations.

They set up a language-focused pre-school setting with roughly equal proportions of typically developing children, children learning English as an additional language (EAL) and children with delayed language development. The programmes they designed have subsequently been adopted into and adapted by a variety of other pre-school settings in the US, and have been demonstrated to improve language skills in typically developing children, EAL children and language-delayed children.

Dramatic role-play activities (for example, the circus, going to the beach, camping, spring-cleaning the house, going to the doctor, building a house, going to a farm, being a firefighter, gardening) were designed to afford opportunities to introduce new vocabulary to the children, and to extend the range of sentence structures they experienced and used. An adult took part in each role-play activity, acting as both a play facilitator (by joining in with the play and modelling appropriate scripts) and a language facilitator (by asking open ended questions, recasting and expanding children's utterances, providing contrastive feedback to children, such as: 'Yes, that's a cow, and this is a horse.') and redirecting a child to request items from another child. The themes used for role-play were designed also to extend children's conceptual knowledge of the world and to enable them to interact enjoyably and appropriately with their peers. Role-play activities were designed collectively by staff in the setting, with roles to be adopted and vocabulary to be introduced clearly defined in advance.

Dramatic role-play activities were also used to good effect in the Dockrell et al (2006)⁸ intervention in the UK.

4 Activities offering good opportunities to develop language: creative activities

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Bunce (1995) describes a range of creative activities (for example, junk modelling, puppet- and mask-making, using play-dough, drawing, painting, printing), all typically available in pre-school settings but used here with a specific focus on language and communication. The activities were designed to foster children’s creativity and small-motor development, increase children’s vocabulary, practise their turn-taking skills and develop their ability to converse with peers and adults. Activities were implemented in small groups, with an adult taking part and acting as facilitator for both the creative and the language and communication aspects of the activity.

Rationale for implementing specific activities

1 Ensure every child gets good language input

As you make your visits to the targeted settings, imagine you are a fly on the wall, watching what goes on between adults and children as they take part in different activities, indoors and outdoors. What might you notice?

For their research, Dockrell, Stuart and King⁹ sent some ‘expert flies’ (researchers trained to observe interactions between children and adults) to watch and record talk between children and adults in 12 pre-school settings.

These expert flies observed many examples of good talking and listening – episodes in which the adults were listening to the children and providing good language-input to the children (we describe what is meant by ‘good language-input’ in section 2 below).

However, they also noticed that this good language-input happened much more in certain situations and activities. There was very little good language-input to children when they were outdoors playing freely, or taking part in unstructured play indoors. In these situations, adults tended mostly to tell children what to do (or, more usually, what not to do!) or to ask them closed questions about what they were doing. (A closed question is one to which the child need only give a one-word answer.)

The good language-input happened most in small-group activities where four to six children were engaged in a focused activity, together with an adult: for example, investigating floating and sinking in the water tray, using different materials to make a collage or looking at a book together.

What surprised the expert flies was that many children in each of the settings never chose to take part in these focused small-group activities: they preferred to spend their time riding bikes, pushing prams or building with the big bricks. This meant that although there was some very good language-input on offer in the settings many children never experienced it.

⁹ Dockrell, J., Stuart, M. & King, D. Supporting oral language skills in the early years. Literacy Today.
Can you think how to make sure that every child in your targeted settings regularly experiences good language-input from the adults? In section 4, you can see how the settings that took part in the intervention study adapted their ways of working to good effect that made a real difference to children’s language-learning.

2 What constitutes good language-input?

We expect all children to develop oral language easily and quickly but the apparent ease with which language usually develops masks the difficulty of the task facing the child. Children need to learn what words mean. They also need to learn how to put words together to make sentences, which means absorbing some complex rules. Children do not learn these things by themselves in a vacuum. The ways in which adults talk to and with children can have dramatic effects on the ease and speed with which children develop the ability to understand language and to use language to express their own thoughts and feelings.

Four key principles underpin talk that supports young children’s language development.

i Responding sensitively to children’s attempts to communicate is the first step, whether the child is a tiny baby who communicates through smiling, cooing and crying, or an older child who communicates through looking, gesturing and talking. The golden rule here is to notice what the child is paying attention to or trying to explain and to develop talk about that.

ii Observing and commenting on the child’s current interest helps develop the child’s language and thinking.

iii Talking to children, in language they are likely to understand, matters. Children learn most readily from input that fits the language they already understand and takes them a little beyond this. So, a two-year-old who is just beginning to put words together will profit from hearing short, simple sentences that describe things or events with which they are currently engaged (for example, if the child is playing with a toy horse and comments: ‘Horsey jump,’ you might join in with: ‘Yes, the horse can jump.’). A four-year-old will be able to produce longer, more complex sentences (for example, playing with the same horse, the four-year-old might comment: ‘I'm going to make the horse jump,’ and you might join in with: ‘Yes, you can make the horse jump over the hedge.’). Talking with young children is more than just providing good examples. Adults can use a range of techniques both to encourage children to provide longer utterances and to support the use of more complex sentence constructions, as demonstrated by the following examples.
Open-ended questions

The use of open-ended questions (for example, ‘I wonder what the little boy wants?’) can encourage children to respond in full sentences or even several sentences. It can also give you opportunities to continue a conversation. In contrast, the closed question: ‘Does the little boy want the car?’ leads only to ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ or ‘I don’t know.’

Expansions

Expansions involve adding more to the child’s original utterance. Typically, the adult repeats what the child has said but may add additional informative information (for example, a two-year-old might offer you a doll and say, ‘Dolly breakfast,’ and you might respond: ‘Yes, dolly is eating breakfast.’). Your response (the input you provide) values the child’s contribution (by acknowledging the child’s intended meaning) and provides a scaffold for the next language level (by providing a complete sentence).

Recasts

These are adult responses that expand on or change what the child said but maintain most or all of the child’s intended meaning. They are often contingent on an error made by the child: they are given as immediate responses to what the child has just said. For example, if the child says, ‘I drank all my milk,’ the adult responds with the recast: ‘Yes, you drank all your milk.’ This provides the child with information about the correct form of the verb (drank not drinked) at a time when they are most likely to absorb this new information (because it relates directly and immediately to their own utterance). Recasts can model the correct grammatical form, as in this example, or can make changes to sound (for example, if the child says ‘Otay’ you recast: ‘Okay’) or to vocabulary (for example, if the child says, ‘Want cup,’ while looking at a glass, you recast: ‘You want the glass.’) or to pragmatics (for example, the endless parental recasts that highlight cultural conventions in the vein of: ‘You’d like some more cake, please.’). Recasts do not follow solely from child errors: both grammatical and ungrammatical utterances can be recast.

iv Taking time to respond

Sometimes, when children are slow to respond or are struggling with language, we feel we need to say something – we jump in to repeat a question or provide the answer ourselves.

Give children enough time.

Learn to give children enough time to respond. Children are learning language, so it takes time for them to gather their thoughts and provide an
answer. This can be particularly true when they are responding to an open-ended question. Think what it feels like when you are responding in another language in which you are not completely fluent! Sometimes it helps if you just count to 10 in your head while the child is thinking about how to answer.

*Can you help them prepare their response?*

Learn to provide prompts or probes that support the child in providing a response. Again, these can be in the form of open-ended questions to provide the child the opportunity to develop their ideas and translate them into speech. For example, if you’ve been talking about Little Red Riding Hood, and you’re waiting for the child to respond to your question: ‘I wonder why the wolf put on Granny’s night cap?’ you might later add helpfully: ‘Perhaps he wanted to look like Granny?’ and the child might then continue: ‘Yes, and he wanted to trick Little Red Riding Hood.’

### 3 Materials to support language-learning

Children can learn and develop language in a range of contexts and with many different toys and games. You do not need special materials: the key to language learning is not *what materials you have* but *how you use them*. Language is about communication. Use the toys, games and other materials in your setting as opportunities to engage the child’s interest and provide topics of conversation. Your role is to be the sensitive adult who is able to take part in conversations that support the children’s language learning (see section 2).

*Routines* and *rituals* provide ideal opportunities to support language learning. The predictable nature of these contexts provides regular opportunities, throughout the day, to expose children to a broad range of vocabulary and language structures. You will find guidance on making the most of everyday activities to promote language development in Section 2 of this guidance as well as in the practitioner guidance.

*Books* offer many opportunities to talk and learn. Children learn to recognise pictures and realise that they stand for real things. Talking about the pictures in the book provides new ways to say things and promotes children’s ability to develop language to talk about things that are not present, and to talk about feelings and beliefs. Dialogic book-reading is a useful strategy to support overall language development; more information about this will be available in the second instalment of the practitioner guidance.

*Make-believe* and *socio-dramatic play* provide opportunities to develop children’s ability to communicate with others and also to develop their imagination. These contexts provide the basis for children to participate in the discussion of ideas and express knowledge and understandings. Careful
choice of role-play activities allows the practitioner to develop targeted vocabulary and narrative opportunities. Dressing-up areas can provide children with the opportunity to practise language they have heard, but possibly not used, and to explore new ideas as they play someone else’s role. Practitioners can use these opportunities to develop themes and activities and/or extend the language children use in other contexts throughout the educational setting.

Toys can be used as props or tools to support language interaction. Toys alone will not develop a child’s ability to communicate; however, careful consideration of their use in social contexts with peers and adults provides the potential to develop communicative exchanges. As children grow older, board games may serve as particularly useful tools to encourage discussion of plans, strategies and solutions.

4 Examples of planning and organisation to support language-learning in early years settings

Settings that took part in the intervention study adapted the way in which they worked to ensure that all children experienced good language-input regularly.

This meant that, twice a week, each child was required to take part in a short small-group activity related to the children’s interests, with an adult who focused on providing good language-input. This was a big change in practice for the settings, because it was not their usual procedure to require children to take part in activities: children were usually free to choose what they did throughout the day.

Staff found it helpful to make groups of four to six children, with a range of language abilities in each group. This meant that children in each group got used to being together. To make sure every child knew which group they were in, illustrated charts were prominently displayed on the wall at a height low enough for children to see them easily. A chart of groups might look like this (perhaps with photos of children alongside their names). You should use the information gleaned from the monitoring tool to inform your selection of children for groups.
Staff also found it helpful to make a plan of the language group sessions, to show which adults would take which groups on which days and at what times. This might seem too formal and structured but, in fact, it just helped the adults to make the sessions part of the normal daily routine of a setting and the children thought it was great fun. As an example, if you had seven groups of children needing to take part in two activities a week, and five adults available to take groups, your plan might look like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:30 children arrive: usual routines</td>
<td>Bears (Jane)</td>
<td>Giraffes (Josie)</td>
<td>Elephants (Sandra)</td>
<td>Kangaroos (Josie)</td>
<td>Penguins (Jane)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15 language group</td>
<td>10:30 snack time</td>
<td>Usual routines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45 language group</td>
<td>Zebras (Sandra)</td>
<td>Monkeys (Rachel)</td>
<td>Bears (Emine)</td>
<td>Giraffes (Rachel)</td>
<td>Elephants (Josie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 lunch time</td>
<td>Kangaroos (Emine)</td>
<td>Penguins (Sandra)</td>
<td>Zebras (Jane)</td>
<td>Monkeys (Emine)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 language group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 home time</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

If you decide that settings would benefit from adopting such a plan, make sure that you plan the sessions to fit the rhythm of their day and that they last no longer than 10–15 minutes. In this example, staff did find it helpful to keep the times constant throughout the week: the less you need to think about when you’re going to do something, the more time you have to get on and do it. They also liked the fact that every member of staff was involved in making sure all children took part in activities with a focus on language. Of course, this did not mean staff only focused on language during these specific sessions. In fact, they found that the practice they put in during the language sessions improved the language input they provided to children in all activities throughout the day.
You might also like to give each adult a personal timetable. For example, Jane’s personal timetable would record that she works with Bears at 10:15 on Mondays, with Zebras at 1:00 on Wednesdays and with Penguins at 10:15 on Fridays; Josie’s would record that she works with Giraffes at 10:15 on Tuesdays, with Kangaroos at 10:15 on Thursdays and with Elephants at 11:45 on Fridays.

Staff found it helpful to plan activities together. As we said earlier, you don’t need special materials or scripted programmes for language work. You need to know the principles and techniques of talking with children in ways that foster language development. You can use toys, books and materials that are already available in the setting. Some activities can be regularly repeated over time. These include talking about the pictures in a picture book (where you can provide variety of content by using different books telling different stories about different things), or engaging in make-believe and role-play with your group (where you can play at different things, such as having a birthday party, or going to the seaside, or going to the library), or playing ‘Simon says…’.

Other activities you might introduce occasionally, or even only once only, include organised activities in the water tray or searching for snails and worms in the garden. Whatever activities you plan, think about the opportunities they offer for developing children’s vocabulary and their ability to describe events as they happen. Staff also found it useful to make record charts so that they could easily record which groups had taken part in which activities each week and which children had missed out by being away from the setting when their scheduled activities took place. A weekly record chart might look like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week beginning Monday 25th September</th>
<th>Monday 25th</th>
<th>Tuesday 26th</th>
<th>Wednesday 27th</th>
<th>Thursday 28th</th>
<th>Friday 29th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:15 language group</td>
<td>Bears (Jane)</td>
<td>Giraffes (Josie)</td>
<td>Elephants (Sandra)</td>
<td>Kangaroos (Josie)</td>
<td>Penguins (Jane)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45 language group</td>
<td>Zebras (Sandra)</td>
<td>Monkeys (Rachel)</td>
<td>Bears (Emine)</td>
<td>Giraffes (Rachel)</td>
<td>Elephants (Josie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture book session</td>
<td></td>
<td>Picture book session</td>
<td>Water play session</td>
<td>Water play session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 language group</td>
<td>Kangaroos (Emine)</td>
<td>Penguins (Sandra)</td>
<td>Zebras (Jane)</td>
<td>Monkeys (Emine)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water-play session</td>
<td></td>
<td>Water-play session</td>
<td>Water play session</td>
<td>Water play session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in this example, one easy way to keep records up to date is to keep the chart on the wall and simply cross through each session once it has taken place, and write in the relevant box the names of any children who were not able to take part (as shown for Jane’s session with Bears on Monday 25 September). At the end of each week, they put the completed chart into their record folder, thus providing a record of everything that the children had done during the course of the year.

Staff in the intervention found that having clear systems for groups, session times and record-keeping left them free to concentrate on planning and implementing enjoyable activities and to focus their attention on language. For the children, these activities were as informal and apparently unstructured as what happened during the rest of their day – simply, play with a purpose.
Making the most of everyday activities

Ways in which early years practitioners can support and develop children’s speech, language and communication

These materials provide a few examples of activities that, typically, occur every day in early years settings. They describe ways in which the activities can be used to promote children’s language development. The activities are grouped according to children’s age and stage of development; these broadly match both those in the EYFS and the descriptors for child language development in the ECAT monitoring tool. The activities are described in terms of the four themes of the EYFS and they can be adapted to suit children of different ages. Each page outlines the ways in which practitioners can use the activity to support children’s language development at an appropriate level by recognising the Unique Child, building Positive Relationships, creating Enabling Environments and supporting the child’s Learning and Development.
The baby needs to learn how to reach out and hold things, how to take something in one hand and transfer it to the other hand. The baby also starts to learn how to explore things in the immediate environment and how to concentrate for increasing periods of time.

**Enabling Environments** provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

- Provide a variety of appropriate toys for the baby to explore, such as light-weight rattles, squasy balls.
- Mobiles and activity centres that the baby can watch and reach out for are also useful.

**A Unique Child** who is valued and listened to

- Allow the baby opportunities to explore an object or visual stimulus in their own time.
- If the baby drops the object and is unable to retrieve it, give it back so they can continue to explore it. However, if the baby drops it twice, quickly, they are probably telling you that they want to explore something else!

**Positive Relationships** that build and support communication

- Take time.
- Vary the objects and toys.
- Name the object the baby looks at.
- If the baby looks towards an object that is out of reach, give it to them and name it, for example, ‘Ball? Here’s the ball.’
Learning and Development

Exploring objects

Why?

From the age of six months a child needs to start learning about objects. They learn what an object looks like, feels like, how it is used and how it is not used. The baby will start to store this information in their brain and gradually add to it. This provides essential foundations so that at around 12–15 months the baby can start to add details about how to understand the word for the object or person and later how to say the word.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of toys and everyday objects to explore. Perhaps present the objects in a ‘treasure basket’.

Involve the child in everyday routines such as washing, dressing and eating so they begin to understand what real objects are and how they are used in real situations.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Allow the child opportunities to explore the object in their own time.

Follow the child’s interest.

Wait for the child to react.

Note the things the child is interested in. Use the things the child is interested in at another time but also present new objects to explore.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Name the object the baby holds or looks at.

Use the same, short phrases during routines, for example, ‘On the mat....down we go...let’s change this nappy.’ or ‘mmm....nice drink.’ or ‘Vicki’s going...bye-bye Vicki.’

Give the baby real objects in everyday situations to explore, for example, give an extra spoon at mealtimes, a shoe when dressing, a comb when you comb their hair. Sometimes show the child how to use an object. For example, if you give them a hairbrush and they put it in their mouth, gently guide their hand to brush their hair.

The Early Communicator
Learning and Development

Exploring sounds

Why?

Being able to listen carefully to one sound or voice among other background noises is a skill that young children have to learn. It is important because it will enable a child to ignore irrelevant noise and to concentrate on important information such as an adult talking.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

A young child is usually curious and may be aware of sounds that we tend to ignore.

Watch the child carefully, note times when they notice a sound and explore the child’s interest by stopping, listening too and talking about the noise.

If a child does not appear to be interested in sounds, listen for noises that you think might intrigue the child and talk about them.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen for sounds in the learning environment. Sounds indoors might include water, kitchen or meal preparation noises, children playing, shouting or using certain toys. Outside sounds might include aeroplanes, cars, wind.

Name the source of the sound, for example, ‘Oh! Aeroplane. Can you see it? Look – up in the sky...aeroplane.’

Sound-makers can be used to encourage communicating ‘more’, ‘again’, ‘gone’ etc.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Use everyday sounds in the learning environment – inside and outside. Try to be more aware of all the sounds around you.

Provide or make sound and music-making toys such as squeezy or push-button sound-makers.

Have a period of the day where the television or radio is turned off, to help the child focus on the sounds around them.

The Attentive Communicator
Learning and Development

Picture books

Why?

Picture books and simple stories provide valuable opportunities for children to hear repeated language, copy words and perhaps to start naming pictures. Sharing books also helps to develop listening and attention skills. For this age group, focus on things a child can see on each page. Name the objects or people and describe what they are doing to encourage the development of action words such as ‘walking, jumping, smiling’.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Give a child opportunities to choose their own book from a wide variety of book types and topics.

A child may want you to read the story, or to talk about the pictures, or to point to pictures for you to name and or may try to tell you what things are.

Listen, wait and watch for the child to indicate what they want.

If a child always chooses the same book, try to widen their interest by looking at a few pages of another book that you think they might like, before sharing the book they usually select.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Sometimes sit and read a book with a child. At other times give the child time and space to explore a book on their own.

If sharing a book, respond to how the child wants to use it.

Think about the language the child understands and uses. Model examples that are only slightly more difficult than what the child can say. For example, if the child sees a cow and says, ‘Moo,’ you say: ‘Moo, it’s a cow.’ If the child says, ‘Cow,’ you say, ‘The cow is eating,’ etc.

Listen, wait and watch for the child to indicate what they want.

If the language used in the book is too difficult, make up your own but keep the story brief and use simple words and sentences.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of simple books. Picture books of everyday objects, animals or people doing everyday things, or simple stories about everyday situations are invaluable for developing vocabulary and language. Also include a variety of types of books: board books, flap books, noisy books, material books, waterproof books, books with photos and books with drawings.
Learning and Development

Water tray
Why?

Young children love water. Water can be used to develop vocabulary and language, sharing and problem solving.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.
Follow the child’s interest.
Sometimes play alongside the child. Listen to what the child says or tries to say and provide models of words and sentences that they can begin to copy. At other times, give the child time and space to explore and solve their own problems.
A child of this age may find it difficult to share toys. Try to encourage them to take turns with the equipment.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.
Think about the language the child understands and uses. Model examples that are only slightly more difficult than what the child can say. For example, if they child says, ‘Bucket,’ you say, ‘Bucket, the bucket’s full of water.’

Enabling Environments provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Consider varying the water-play to create interest. Change the water by adding bubbles or colour or add a large block of ice.
Change the toys to promote a wider use of words and to help the child solve new problems, for example, use sea creatures, pebbles and shells, or boats and people or, another time, try buckets, water wheels and pumps.

The Innovative Communicator
Learning and Development

Playing in the role-play area – a home corner

Why?
Playing in the home corner enables a child to act out routines which they see at home and when they are out and about. This encourages the child to start to use their imagination, to use language to organise their thoughts, plan a sequence of events and begin to explore the thoughts and feelings of others. Home-corner play provides valuable opportunities for the child to hear and use everyday words and sentences.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.
Follow the child’s interest.
Before age 30 months, a child is likely to want to play on their own or watch others play. It is important to provide the child the space to do this.
After 30 months, a child may start to play with others. A child may appreciate opportunities to play with just one or two friends in the home corner.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.
Encourage the child to act out everyday events. Follow the child’s interest, for example, they may undress Teddy and then, if necessary, suggest what to do next, for example, give Teddy a bath. Next time, the child might undress and bath Teddy and could be shown how to put him to bed.
Listen to what the child says. Respond by answering questions, or expand what the child said. Avoid asking too many questions yourself.

Enabling Environments
provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Ensure that the equipment in the home corner is age-appropriate and represents the rich diversity of the children’s own homes. It is important to vary the role-play area to fit in with different themes, such as a builder’s yard or a cafe.
The topic needs to be simple and within the children’s experience.

22–36 months The Developing Communicator
Learning and Development

Puzzles

Why?

Puzzles provide valuable opportunities to develop fine motor and manipulation skills, picture-matching, pattern-completing, concentration but also language. Puzzles can provide another everyday situation to maximise the use of language.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.
Follow the child’s lead.
Avoid asking too many questions so that the child can focus on things that interest them. The child will learn more this way.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch. Respond to the child by answering questions, or expanding what they say by repeating their sentence and adding just one or two extra words.

With children of this age, continue to focus on the names of things and what things/people are doing but start to introduce names for parts of objects. Puzzles are ideal for this, for example, as parts of a fire engine are added to the picture, name the ladder, fire extinguisher, lights, bell, hose. If the child has a good vocabulary of objects and parts of objects, start thinking about position words: on, under, on top, size: big, little, long, short, colour: red, blue and numbers: one, two.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of puzzles and inset boards to give opportunities for children to listen to and say different words and sentences.

Ensure that the puzzles are appropriate for a diverse range of ability, from simple inset puzzles, to big floor puzzles that groups of children can complete together, to more complicated 16- or 32-piece puzzles.

The Developing Communicator
Learning and Development

**Sand**

**Why?**
Children love sand. Sand can be used to develop vocabulary and language, sharing and problem solving.

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**A Unique Child** who is valued and listened to

- Listen, wait and watch.
- Follow the child’s interest.
- Listen to what the child says or tries to say and provide models of words and sentences.
- Encourage the child to play with other children. It may help to limit the number of children playing in the sand so there is space and room for two or three to relax, share, develop their ideas and chat to each other. If a small group is talking, explore and extend the play positively, avoid interrupting. Children learn a lot by listening to each other.

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**Positive Relationships** that build and support communication

- Listen, wait and watch.
- Think about the language the child understands and uses. Model examples that are only slightly more difficult than what the child can say. For example, if the child says, ‘The digger is coming,’ you say, ‘The yellow digger is coming with lots of sand.’
- If the child has a good vocabulary of objects and parts of objects, start thinking about position words: on, under, on top, size: big, little, long, short, colour: red, blue and number: one, two.

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**Enabling Environments** provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Consider varying the sand play to create interest. Change the sand so that sometimes it is dry and sometimes wet. Change the toys to promote a wider use of words and to help the children solve new problems, for example, use specific sets of animals: desert animals or insects with or without natural materials such as twigs, leaves, fur cones. On other occasions try people, trucks and diggers or traditional buckets, spades, sandwheels and rakes.

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**The Developing Communicator**
Learning and Development

Miniature world toys

Why?

Playing with miniature toys, for example, dolls house, farms, represents the next stage of development and enables children to act out the routines they experience in everyday life. This encourages development of children’s imagination and helps them to use language to organise their thoughts, plan a sequence of events and begin to explore the thoughts and feelings of others.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

- Listen, wait and watch.
- Follow the child’s interest.
- Listen to what the child says or tries to say and provide models of words and sentences. Avoid asking too many questions yourself.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

- Listen, wait and watch.
- Encourage the child to act out little scenarios and stories.
- Encourage the child to play with different characters and explore what each ‘person’ does and says. If the child wants this, you can take on the character of one person while they play another, but ensure that you follow the child’s story line.
- If the child’s play is very repetitive, bring in different characters or toys alongside the favourites.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of miniature play equipment, arranged invitingly. It is usually helpful to keep different topic areas in different boxes but if a child wishes to mix them, for example, zoo animals with farm animals or hospital equipment with castles and knights, this can help to promote imagination. Sorting the toys into the correct boxes at the end provides yet another opportunity for talking.
Learning and Development

Dressing-up

Why?

Dressing up encourages a child to use imagination and to explore the thoughts and feelings of others. Dressing up can be an extension of other play, such as home-corner or outdoor activities, so that an older child can develop play and story ideas.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.
Follow the child’s interest.
Can the child begin to take on the character and role of the person they are pretending to be? This can significantly broaden the child’s opportunities for extending play and experimenting with the thoughts and feelings of different people in different situations. The use of language during this type of activity is very important for the child’s development of social skills and empathy, as also is story-telling, which will support literacy skills.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.
Encourage the child to act out little scenarios and stories.
Encourage the child to play with different characters and explore what each ‘person’ does and says. If the child wants this, you can take on the character of one person while they play another, but ensure that you follow the child’s story line.
If the child’s play is very repetitive, bring in different characters or toys alongside the favourites.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of dressing-up clothes which reflect the rich diversity of a child’s life and experiences. Consider times when the range of clothes and play materials might be theme-based so that a child can develop a theme or explore a particular situation or familiar story.

30–50 months: The Questioning Communicator
Learning and Development

Café time

Why?

Café time is an everyday routine that can provide valuable opportunities to develop vocabulary and social use of language.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Consider giving each child a turn at helping at café time.
Where it is safe, the child should be involved in food preparation, for example, putting food on the plates, cups on trays and organising the tables. This promotes independence and organisation skills. It also provides valuable one-to-one opportunities for a child to have the undivided attention and conversation with an adult during an everyday situation.

Tidying up is good for organisation and independence too.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Consider encouraging a few children to hand food round to small groups of peers. Encourage the child who is offering food to use appropriate language, for example, ‘Ami, what would you like to eat?’ and for the child receiving the food to ask for what they want and thank the child who has ‘served’ the food. The food can then be placed on the tables for children to help themselves, if this is the normal routine for the setting.

If a child struggles to use language in this situation, provide appropriate models and examples of things to say.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Make sure that an adult is in the café to keep the conversation flowing. Provide a wide variety of snacks to encourage each child to try different foods and learn the names of the different things, the names of parts of the things we eat, for example, peel, pips, skin, and describing words such as prickly, shiny, smooth, rough, round, heavy, light.

The Questioning Communicator
Learning and Development

Computers

Why?

Computers can be used to develop language. A child can sit with a friend and talk about what they can see or an adult can provide valuable language models to extend a child’s vocabulary and sentences.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Use this opportunity to engage with the child who loves computers and does not usually want to talk to adults.

The child will have the controls and will take the lead. However, could the child pass the controls over to you and tell you how to complete an activity? This would enable the child to share their skills and knowledge and give directions, but in a real situation.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Sit alongside the child quietly. Listen, wait and watch.

Be mindful of when it is appropriate or helpful to talk and when the child needs time and space to explore or solve something on their own.

Encourage the child to take turns with someone else and to give instructions as to how to play the game.

Focus on words that describe the objects on the screen or describe a sequence of events including concepts such as ‘now, and then, first, next, soon, last’.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of games and stories to ensure broad experiences.

Many software activities for this age group target numeracy and literacy but they can also be used to develop language.

The Questioning Communicator
**Learning and Development**

**Sharing books and re-telling stories**

**Why?**

Four- and five-year-old children should be familiar with some simple stories that have been shared time and again within the setting. These may be traditional tales such as ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’ or more recent texts such as ‘We’re going on a bear hunt’. Retelling stories is a valuable opportunity to develop language and important preparation for when a child comes to create a story for themselves.

**A Unique Child** who is valued and listened to

Provide the appropriate resources.

Listen, wait and watch.

Give each child opportunities to work in small groups and organise themselves to act out stories. This will help to develop important skills of sharing, arguing, negotiation and respect for other people’s views. It is important to give each child time and space to do this, but there may be times when you need to intervene and suggest or model appropriate resolutions.

**Positive Relationships** that build and support communication

Listen and watch the children as they retell the story.

If a child finds it difficult to retell a story as part of a group, encourage them to share a story they like just with you. Start by sharing the book. Read it several times on different occasions and gradually encourage the child to take over by describing the pictures. Slowly introduce puppets or resources from a story sack, while sharing the book, and work towards acting out parts of the story without referring to the text. If the language and learning is at the child’s pace, their story-telling skills will gradually develop.

**Enabling Environments**

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Share a broad range of books, one-to-one with children but also in small groups. Read the books and then provide a wide variety of ways of exploring the books and story-lines such as story sacks, dressing-up clothes or miniature characters and toys that match a story, puppets of varying kinds, a matching book with the pages cut up and laminated so a child can arrange them in order (for example, hanging them up on a washing line) and tell their own version.

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40–60 months: The Skilled Communicator
Learning and Development

Creating camps

Why?

Making camps and houses, inside and outside, draws together a wide range of skills, many of which rely on, or encourage, more complex abstract language such as imagination, planning, problem-solving, interacting with friends, vocabulary and use of sentences.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Encourage every child to explore beyond the boundaries of commercially produced resources to create their own worlds.

Enable each child to play in the camps at a level with which they are comfortable. This might be leading, forming and planning the camp or it might be sitting quietly in a corner of the camp, making cups of tea.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, watch and wait.

If a child finds it difficult to play with the group or difficult to engage with children or adults, try to sit quietly near this child. Gradually, if you follow their lead, the child may include you in their play. This may give you opportunities to maximise the child’s language by responding to their questions, or expanding what they say by repeating their sentence and adding just one or two extra words.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of materials and resources to enable the children to create their own camps. There are ready-made pop-up houses available but the task here is to use materials such as sheets, scraps of material, string and pegs from inexpensive sources such as scrap stores and charity shops to fire the imagination and creativity of the children. Allow them to use twigs and leaves they find outside.

All this fun uses language and communication.

The Skilled Communicator
Learning and Development

Construction

Why?

Construction toys and resources provide valuable opportunities to develop fine motor and manipulation skills, problem-solving and concentration, but also language. Construction toys can encourage a child to state their plans and then explain how this was or was not achieved.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

It is important to allow each child to develop their own construction.
If it is very repetitive, consider showing the child how to extend their idea by adding something or by using it in a different way.
Respect the efforts of every child and encourage every child to respect the efforts of their peers.
It is important to listen to the child because a pile of junk could be something quite different through the eyes of a child.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, watch and wait.
It can help to sit alongside a child with a matching set of construction materials and build a model of your own. This can generate a natural, relaxed conversation.
Encourage the child to explain what they are planning and doing.
Model appropriate language and include words such as ‘now, and then, first, next, soon, last’ as well as words that describe the construction.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of construction materials.
Some will be commercially available resources, but junk modelling and scraps of wood can offer different challenges.

The Skilled Communicator
Guidance for the Language Consultant

Making the most of everyday activities for language development

There are examples of everyday activities in the practitioner guidance, with advice about how to use these to maximise language opportunities. There are different activities for different age-groups and each sheet reinforces the four themes:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development.

Some of the advice is repetitive across the different routines because there are a few key principles that should be incorporated within every activity involving children in a pre-school setting in order to promote speech, language and communication.

1 Follow the child’s lead.

Following the child’s lead gives a strong signal that you are interested in what the child is doing. It increases the likelihood of your language being focused on the child’s point of interest and it helps the child to sustain concentration.

Observe the child playing when they have access to a wide range of toys. Watch what the child plays with and note their preferences.

Wait for the child to play with their choice of toys. Let the child lead the play. You join in by playing as the child indicates.

If the play becomes very repetitive, let the child lead initially then model slightly different ways of playing with the toys by playing alongside the child.

While following a child’s lead, Stop, Observe and Respond.
Stop

Stop encouraging the child to do what you want them to do. Instead let the child lead the play and choose what they would like to do.

Observe

Watch and observe the child. This reinforces the idea of letting the child lead. It shows that you are interested in what the child is doing and it will make your responses more relevant and appropriate. While watching, make note of any attempts to communicate. Treat these attempts, however approximate, as meaningful communications and respond accordingly.

Respond

Respond by modelling language that is useful for the child. Respond by:

- *explaining* – describe what the child is doing or looking at, using short, simple sentences that are two or three words longer than the sentences the child would normally use. If the language matches their interest, the child is more likely to listen and absorb the information.
- *repeating* – repeat what the child says but use a correctly structured and articulated sentence.
- *expanding* – repeat what the child says but add 1 or 2 words either at the end of the sentence or within the sentence.

2 Monitor the number of questions and directions used.

Children with delayed language development often play quietly. As competent speakers we hate silence so we often fill these gaps with questions.

Questions are important to develop a child’s understanding but we need to be aware of the quality and quantity of questions. Questions are not always helpful because they may not relate to the child’s train of thought, so, depending on their level of attention the child may not be able to listen to unrelated information. Questions and directions tend to mean that the adult is leading, not the child.

When asking questions, bear in mind these points.

- Avoid asking questions that you know the answer to
- Avoid using closed questions that only require a single-word answer.
- Consider the child’s level of understanding. Does the child understand the type of question?
Is the question too long?

Don’t use multiple questions, for example: ‘What are you going to do after pre-school? Are you going home or are you going shopping?’ Multiple questions usually arise when the adult realises that the first question was too difficult and quickly tries to rephrase it. The combination of the questions is often more confusing.

The question should relate to what the child is doing or looking at. This means that the child will still be leading and that the question is more likely to be relevant to the child’s train of thought.

Ask a question and wait at least for three seconds, possibly up to ten seconds. Young children need time to decide what to say and plan an answer.

3 Provide opportunities to communicate.

How many opportunities are there for each child to talk? In a well-structured pre-school setting, children might have all they need or the adults may anticipate everything. What opportunities do they have to ask for things? To object to doing something? To tell you what they have done? To predict what will happen next or solve problems by sharing ideas?

A child may be busy with self-directed play but may not be talking. This needs to be carefully monitored. A child needs time and space to play and explore on their own but a child also benefits from opportunities to engage with others. Adults need to be observant and aware of a child who may be avoiding activities and situations that promote the use of language and communication. Situations may need to be manipulated to create reasons for a particular child to request, reject, report, predict or solve a problem.

4 A young child will find it easier to talk about something they are looking at or doing.

5 Don’t correct mistakes in grammar or word order.

Model back to the child the correct way of saying the sentence.

6 Consider the child’s development of vocabulary.

7 A child with delayed expressive language may have a limited understanding of spoken language.
Monitoring the implementation and impact of Every Child a Talker

This section of the consultant guidance sets out the required processes for monitoring and evaluating the progress of ECAT. Given the important priority that should be given to strengthening children’s early language and the levels of funding invested in ECAT, it is expected that progress will be monitored at three levels:

- local authority (LA) progress in planning and implementing ECAT
- early years settings’ progress in improving language provision
- the progress made by children in early language development in the targeted settings.

Local authority progress

As part of ECAT, LAs are required to:

- attend National Strategy ECAT events
- recruit an Early Language Consultant (ELC) to lead and co-ordinate the programme
- undertake an audit of training and support for early language within the LA
- identify and work intensively with 20 targeted early years settings
- agree with targeted settings how much funding will be allocated for the release of a lead practitioner regularly and the activities or training that the practitioners will undertake
- provide training, support and guidance to lead practitioners in each of those settings
- work with lead settings to identify ‘linked’ settings
- direct CPD money to targeted and linked settings as a priority and to all settings to support early language development
- facilitate cluster meetings between settings to share best practice across the LA
- monitor take-up of training opportunities, evaluate impact against setting progress and use of funding
- routinely collect progress data from settings (see below) and share with National Strategies
- ensure that, after the two years of DCSF funding, the programme is effectively embedded and sustained in the LA and has impacted on children’s progress.
How will progress be reported?
Local authorities’ progress will be monitored through regular meetings with the NS Early Years Fieldforce and through the submission of data.

The NS will use this information to report progress to the Minister at key milestones, for example, as part of an update on LA gap-narrowing activities or in response to Foundation Stage Profile results.

**Targeted setting progress**
As part of ECAT, and with support of the ELC, targeted settings will be required to:

- audit training needs of staff within the setting
- identify an ELLP who will be expected to take up training and support related to early language development, including spending time with the ELC
- share that training and offer support to other practitioners in the setting through one-to-one sessions, group sessions and modelling activities
- demonstrate an improved understanding of early language development through day-to-day interaction with children in the setting – creating activities and opportunities to meet the needs of individual children
- complete a confidence schedule, rating their knowledge, skills and understanding of early language on entry to ECAT and at the end of each year
- monitor progress of children in the setting, using the monitoring tool in collaboration with the ELC
- involve parents in their children’s early language development through regular communication, one-to-one consultations and group sessions
- encourage and support parents and carers to complete the questionnaire
- work with ELC and other ELLPs to identify ‘linked’ settings with which to work
- spend time working with practitioners in linked settings, either individually or through cluster arrangements.

How will progress be reported?
Each LA will be expected to monitor the progress of each of the targeted and linked settings and use that information to target support and resources to those settings in greatest need of improvement. This information will be
shared with the NS who will use the data to inform their work with LAs, as well as to provide the DCSF with a picture of how well settings are progressing.

As the ELC, you will play a pivotal role in monitoring progress and particularly in supporting settings to undertake:

- **regular monitoring of children’s speech, language and communication development**, using the monitoring tool (see Annex A)
  Initial observations should be taken at the beginning of the term with ongoing observation and recording of progress. The summative information will be collected termly.

- **analysis of progress against key priorities identified by the setting in the audit or self-evaluation and action plan**

- **monitoring practitioners’ self-evaluations to assess their confidence in the facilitation and support of children’s speech, language and communication development**
  This confidence schedule (see Annex B) should be completed at the beginning of the academic year and repeated at the start of the third term.

- **monitoring of a questionnaire for parents and carers, exploring their perspectives on how to support their child’s communication skills** (see Annex C)
  Parents and carers are central to a child’s life and are children’s first and most enduring educators. Supporting parents and the home learning environment is a key objective of ECAT and so ELLPs should encourage a number of parents/carers from the setting to complete this questionnaire as their child starts, and then a year later. Practitioners’ knowledge of the children and families with whom they work will determine how and when the questionnaire is shared, and should take into account the needs and views of those who may not have English as their first language. Remember also that it is important to seek the views of fathers as well as mothers. Practitioners may wish to personalise this template to their setting, and should be encouraged to do so.

**The monitoring process**

Diagram 1 below provides an overview of the whole monitoring process, including identification of a child’s developmental stage, parental perceptions and practitioner confidence.
Diagram 1: Monitoring progress and development; child, parent and practitioner perceptions and developments

At the start of a child’s entry to an early years setting

Use the monitoring sheet to identify child’s speech, language and communication skills

Identify parental perceptions of child’s speech, language and communication skills

Practitioners complete audit of their confidence in meeting the children’s needs, based upon feedback from child-monitoring and parental questionnaire

Practitioners complete monitoring form for children and continue to observe and record children’s progress (T2)

Practitioners implement strategies to support children’s speech, language and communication development and discuss approaches with parents

If the child’s language does not develop as expected, or any gap between the child’s level and the expected level for their age is not closing, support should be sought from an external agency such as Speech and Language Therapy, with parental agreement

At the end of the year, the following should be completed:
- Child monitoring form identifying speech, language and communication skills and areas for development
- Parental questionnaire
- Practitioner confidence schedule

Outcomes:
- Identification of child’s speech, language and communication level
- Identification of additional needs in relation to speech, language or communication
- Increased parental understanding of their child’s language development and how to support it
- Increased practitioner confidence of how to support each child’s unique development
- Identification of the need for additional support for child
Annex A: Observation and monitoring of young children’s speech, language and communication development

The purpose
The monitoring of the development of children’s communication skills in the early years is designed to ensure that children develop appropriate skills in all areas of communication, including attention and listening, understanding of language, speech sounds and talk, as well as social interaction.

These four areas reflect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile, which provides a clear overview of a child’s abilities at the end of the reception year. To ensure that each child’s speech, language and communication skills are appropriately supported and enhanced, it is essential to have an awareness of the typical developmental stages. This will also help establish a baseline of the child’s abilities and regular monitoring of progress.

The process
There are four key stages to monitoring and supporting the development of children’s communication skills. These are illustrated in the diagram below.
Stage 1: Observation and interaction

- Interact with and observe child and talk to parents about the child’s communication skills
- Identify child’s communication skills in relation to typical development
- Plan and carry out activities and interactions designed to support child’s language development
- Record child’s communication level on monitoring form – include evidence to support decision

Stage 2: Reflection and identification

Stage 3: Recording and gathering evidence

Stage 4: Planning and doing
Guidance

It is essential to ensure that observation involves active interaction with each child, reflecting their individual and unique strengths, needs and experiences. Discussion with a child’s parents/carers will provide a more complete picture of the child’s communication skills and help parents/carers to be aware of their child’s abilities.

When identifying a child’s communication level, it is essential to be familiar with the typical stages of development. From here it is possible to establish which level the child is at, using a range of evidence to support the judgement made. This will include discussions with parents and colleagues, observations and interactions with children. Subsequent planning can then focus on enabling the child to build on established skills to develop new communicative abilities.

It is important that this cycle is regularly completed to help inform practitioners’ awareness of each child’s development, as well as any areas for additional support. Some children will rapidly exceed expectations in their development while others may not be reaching expected levels of development. For some, this may be a case of a slight delay in reaching the level usually associated with their age. For others, there may be a more significant gap between the child’s level of development and what would be expected of other children their age.

By regularly monitoring any variation in development against what is expected, it is possible to find out if cases of delayed development is improving or whether additional support is required. A small difference at an early age can become a much larger difference as children get older. Variations may be due to specific speech, language and communication needs or may be more easily resolvable with some changes in the child’s communication environment and to adults’ practice.

If variations are noted, practitioners should discuss these variations with parents to decide upon a plan of action. Support for speech, language and communication development can be identified by using information from communication-friendly settings and audit of language provision. Once this support is being provided by all the practitioners involved with the child, monitoring can take place over half a term or so. The key aspect of the monitoring is to identify whether progress is being made and whether the gap between the child’s abilities and what is expected for their age is narrowing. If there is little or no progress being made, or the gap is not narrowing, there should be further discussion with the parents and possible referral to the speech and language therapy department.

Most speech and language therapy departments accept referrals from anyone, with the parents’ permission. There are likely to be local procedures in each area, so consideration should also be given to these. In any case,
regular observation and monitoring will establish whether additional input is required from an external professional from the local authority or the speech and language therapy department

**Getting started**

- Familiarise yourself with typical stages of development
- Observe the child during at least five different activities on different days
- Talk to colleagues, parents/carers about the child's communication skills
- Relate observations of the child to developmental stages (T1)
- Record the child's communicative skills on progress monitoring sheet with supporting evidence (T2)
- Plan and complete activities and use interactions with each child, appropriate to their stage of communication development
Using the resources

The tables are provided on the following pages.

*Table 1* provides a reference tool for early years practitioners enabling them to establish the stages of a child’s speech, language and communication development.

*Table 2* enables you to record your observations and monitor a child’s speech, language and communication development. Use this table to record the date that you observed and gathered evidence, noting it in the box that corresponds with the child’s level of ability. Focus on one area of development at a time. This will provide a visual reminder of the level at which the child is functioning. It will also be helpful to make a note of discussions with parents and colleagues, observations and interactions with children to support your judgements. As the child progresses through the year, practitioners should regularly update the monitoring process. A child may continue developing skills at the same stage or may progress to the next. If a child does not appear to be making progress after two terms, it is advisable to seek support from a speech and language therapist as soon as possible. If the child’s development appears to be behind what is expected of their age, refer to the section on *Guidance* above.

When using the following guidelines, it is essential to note that all children are unique and therefore develop at their own rate and in their own way. This table only reflects typical patterns of development across groups of children of the same age. For more detailed information on developmental steps in speech, language and communication visit [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk).
### Table 1 (T1): Typical stages of speech, language and communication development in the early years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage and age</th>
<th>Listening and attention</th>
<th>Understanding of language</th>
<th>Speech sounds and talk</th>
<th>Social skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The early communicator</strong></td>
<td>By 12 months</td>
<td>Recognises parent’s voice and begins to understand frequently used words such as ‘all gone’, ‘no’ and ‘bye-bye’. Stops and looks when hears own name.</td>
<td>Initially uses cries to communicate. Gradually develops speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults; says sounds like ‘baba, nono, gogo’.</td>
<td>Gazes at faces and copies facial movements, e.g. sticking out tongue. Increasingly aware of other people and taking turns in interactions using babble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The attentive communicator</strong></td>
<td>By 18 months</td>
<td>Understanding of single words in context is developing, e.g. ‘cup’, ‘milk’, ‘daddy’. The child can understand more words than they can say.</td>
<td>Progresses from using babble and around 10 single words, although these will often not be very clear.</td>
<td>Likes being with familiar adult and watching them. Developing the ability to follow an adult’s body language, including pointing and gesture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The innovative communicator</strong></td>
<td>By 24 months</td>
<td>By 24 months, understands simple instructions, e.g. ‘get mummy’s shoes’, ‘put your bricks away’, ‘Tell dad tea’s ready.’</td>
<td>Using up to 50 words and is beginning to put 2–3 words together. Frequently asks simple questions, e.g. ‘Where’s my drink?’, ‘What’s that? (towards two years of age). Uses speech sounds p, b, m, w.</td>
<td>Gradually able to engage in ‘pretend’ play with toys. Frustrated when unable to make themselves understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The developing communicator</strong></td>
<td>By 3 years</td>
<td>Developing understanding of simple concepts including in/on/under, big/little. Understands simple ‘who’ and ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions but not ‘why’. Understands a simple story when supported with pictures.</td>
<td>Uses up to 300 different words including descriptive language, space, function. Can link 4–5 words together. May stutter or stammer when thinking what to say. Finds it difficult to say some speech sounds: l, r, y, f, th, s, sh, ch, dz, j.</td>
<td>Holds a conversation but jumps from topic to topic. Interested in others’ play and will join in. Expresses emotions towards adults and peers, using words and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The questioning communicator</strong></td>
<td>By 4 years</td>
<td>Understands more complex questions or instructions with two parts ‘get your jumper and stand by the door’. Now understands ‘why’ questions and is aware of more abstract ideas including time in relation to past, present and future</td>
<td>Uses sentences of four to six words, e.g. ‘I want to play with cars,’ ‘what’s that thingy called?’ Able to remember and enjoys telling long stories or singing songs. Has problems saying r, j, th, ch, sh</td>
<td>Understands turn-taking as well as sharing with adults and peers and can initiate conversations. Enjoys playing with peers and will argue if they disagree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The skilled communicator</strong></td>
<td>By 5 years</td>
<td>Able to follow a simple story without pictures. Understands instructions containing sequencing words; ‘first… after… last’. Aware of more complex humour, laughs at jokes that are told. Understands and enjoys rhyme.</td>
<td>Uses well formed sentences and is easily understood by adults and peers. Frequently asks the meaning of unfamiliar words and may use them randomly Only a few immaturities in speech sounds, ‘th’, ‘r’ and three consonant combinations ‘scribble’</td>
<td>Chooses own friends and is generally co-operative with playmates. Can plan play activities. Takes turns in longer conversations and uses language to gain information, negotiate, discuss feelings/ideas and give opinions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 2 (T2): Progress monitoring sheet

Speech, language and communication: Progress monitoring sheet for children in the early years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Areas of development</th>
<th>Autumn</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Listening and attention:</strong> Turns towards a familiar sound then locates range of sounds with accuracy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The early communicator by 12 months</td>
<td><strong>Understanding of language:</strong> Recognises parent’s voice and begins to understand frequently used words such as ‘all gone’ ‘no’ and ‘bye-bye’. Stops and looks when hears own name.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The attentive communicator by 18 months</td>
<td><strong>Speech sounds and talk:</strong> Initially uses cries to communicate. Gradually develops speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults; says sounds like ‘baba, nono, gogo’.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Social skills:</strong> Gazes at faces and copies facial movements, e.g. sticking out tongue. Increasingly aware of other people and taking turns in interactions using babble.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Listening and attention:</strong> Interested in music and singing. Easily distracted by noises or other people talking.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Understanding of language:</strong> Understanding of single words in context is developing, e.g. ‘cup’, ‘milk’, ‘daddy’. The child can understand more words than they can say.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>The developing communicator by 3 years:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Speech sounds and talk:</strong> Using up to 50 words and is beginning to put 2-3 words together. Frequently asks simple questions, e.g. 'where's my drink?', 'what's that?' Uses speech sounds p, b, m, w.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Social skills:</strong> Gradually able to engage in 'pretend' play with toys. Is frustrated when unable to make self understood.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Listening and attention:</strong> follows adult lead interaction for a short time.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Understanding of language:</strong> understands simple 'who' and 'what' and 'where' questions but not 'why'</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The innovative communicator by 24 months</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech sounds and talk:</strong> Progresses from using babble and around 10 single words, although these will often not be very clear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social skills:</strong> Likes being with familiar adult and watching them. Developing the ability to follow an adult's body language including pointing and gesture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening and attention:</strong> Starting to focus on an activity of their choice. Although finds it difficult to be directed by an adult. Using the child's name helps them to attend to what the adult says, e.g. 'Ben, drink juice', 'Aysha, coat on'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of language:</strong> By 24 months, understands simple instructions, e.g. 'Get mummy's shoes', 'Put your bricks away', 'Tell dad tea's ready.'</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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66
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The questioning communicator</th>
<th>The skilled communicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>By 4 years:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Speech sounds and talk:</strong></td>
<td><em>uses more than 100</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>words including</em></td>
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<td><em>descriptive language,</em></td>
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<td><em>space,</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>function</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Has problems saying:</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>l, r, w, y, f, th, s, sh, ch, dz, j</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social skills:</strong></td>
<td><em>expresses emotions</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>towards adults</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>and peers using</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>words, and actions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening and attention:</strong></td>
<td><em>enjoys listening to</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>stories however can</em></td>
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<td><em>only focus on one</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>thing at a time</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of language:</strong></td>
<td><em>understands more</em></td>
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<td><em>complex questions or</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>instructions with</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>two parts</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>‘get your jumper and</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>stand by the door’.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech sounds and talk:</strong></td>
<td><em>uses sentences of</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>four to six words,</em></td>
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<td><em>e.g. ‘I want to</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>play with cars’, ‘what’s</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>that thingy called?’</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Has problems saying</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>r, j, th, ch, sh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social skills:</strong></td>
<td><em>understands turn</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>taking as well as</em></td>
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<td><em>sharing with adults</em></td>
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<td><em>and peers and can</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>initiate conversations</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>By 5 years:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listening and attention:</strong></td>
<td><em>is now more flexible</em></td>
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<td><em>when attending to</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>something and can</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>listen whilst doing</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of language:</strong></td>
<td><em>understands</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>instructions containing</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>sequencing words,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>‘first… after….last’</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech sounds and talk:</strong></td>
<td><em>uses well formed</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>sentences and is</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>easily understood</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>by adults and peers</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Speech sound errors:</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>th, r</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social skills:</strong></td>
<td><em>Takes turns in longer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>conversations and</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>uses language to</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>gain information,</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>negotiate,</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>discuss feelings/ ideas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>and give opinions</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex B: Practitioner confidence rating questionnaire

As a minimum, this confidence schedule should be completed by the ELLP but it will be more beneficial if used by all practitioners in the setting, to gauge the impact of training and support.

The schedule includes a number of areas relating to the *Speech, Language and Communication Framework* (SLCF). As detailed in the first instalment of this guidance, the SCLF sets out, in appropriate detail, the specific skills and knowledge needed by practitioners to support children’s speech, language and communication development. The SLCF is competence-based and considers skills used in practice. As an online professional development tool, ELLPs can complete a self-evaluation using the SLCF. They should complete the universal stage and this should take around half an hour. This will then identify their current strengths and highlight key areas for ongoing professional development. This can also be repeated at a later date (for example 6 months) to demonstrate specific changes in confidence and practice. The SLCF provides the level of detail needed to effectively support professional development in this area.

http://www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk/SLCF.

In case IT-access is difficult for ELLPs, a paper version of the universal stage of the SLCF is available, although the online format will enable easier collation of information.
# Practitioner confidence schedule questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1–4</th>
<th>Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1–4.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 = very confident</td>
<td>2 = confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Meeting the needs of children’s speech, language and communication development:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding how babies and children under 2 years communicate?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding how children’s speech, language and communication develops from birth to five?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing good ways to develop children’s speech, language and communication?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring children’s progress in speech, language and communication?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Describing a child’s stage of development in speech, language and communication?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifying the next steps in supporting a child’s speech, language and communication?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognising when a child’s speech, language and communication development is not following a typical pattern of development?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowing what to do if you have concerns about a child’s speech, language or communication development, including who to contact?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussing a child’s speech, language and communication skills with their parents?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting parents to work with their child’s speech and language development?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing your skills with colleagues in relation to children’s speech, language and communication development?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking opportunities to develop your skills in relation to supporting children’s speech, language and communication?</td>
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</table>
## Annex C: Parental/carer questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental/Carer Questionnaire</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child: Date:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting: Key worker:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please rate the following questions on a scale of 1–4.  
1 = very good  4 = not so good

### Your child's speech, language and communication development

Please rate:

- Your knowledge of how children learn to talk
- Your understanding of what to expect at different ages
- Your knowledge of ways to help your child develop speech, language and communication skills
- Your confidence in asking the staff at your child’s setting about their speech and language development
- Your knowledge of what to do and who to contact if you have concerns about your child’s speech and language development
References

Bercow, Review of Services for Children and Young People (0–19) with SLCN www.dcsf.gov.uk/bercowreview/


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www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld/itt/cocoaching/directory.html


