

ELDP – Summary of emerging learning from the case studies

This short paper summarises the key learning emerging from the full series of ELDP evaluation case studies. It draws on insights from the case studies from the following sites: Birmingham, Bolton, Cornwall, East Cheshire, Essex, Gateshead, Lancashire, Merton, Newham, Northamptonshire, Sandwell and West Sussex.

More detailed descriptions of the processes involved in cascading the ELDP and the specific impacts emerging at a local level can be found in the individual case study write ups.

This paper supplements the earlier case study summary papers produced in September 2013 and January 2014.

This paper presents the following insights from the case studies:

- Common emerging impacts for different stakeholders
- Learning regarding the cascade process
- Critical success factors and enablers
- Transferable learning and key lessons

Common Impacts

Practitioners and lead practitioners

Throughout all 12 case studies, there were widespread impacts reported from both lead practitioners and local practitioners. These impacts involved reinvigorating experienced practitioners' enthusiasm for SLC, or equipping less experienced practitioners with new sets of knowledge. Practitioners also learnt innovative ways to deliver training sessions.

Lead and local practitioners were very positive on the whole about the ELDP training and programme as a whole, describing it as 'engaging' and 'inspiring'. Impacts among lead and local practitioners can largely be categorised as: increasing confidence; increasing knowledge and awareness; and changing practice. These are explored in more detail below.

Increasing confidence and communication

Multiple lead and local practitioners reported that following the training, they felt personally empowered and had increased confidence when engaging with parents or children, or delivering training to colleagues.

Reinvigoration of enthusiasm for experienced practitioners

Lead practitioners in particular frequently praised the ELDP training for serving as a reminder of what they and local practitioners can do to intervene and make a difference to communication development and improve outcomes:

"It has given me that thirst to make sure I am on top of my game." (Lead practitioner, Essex)

Refreshing lead practitioners' confidence in delivering training to their colleagues

In several case study sites, lead practitioners reported that the ELDP training had not only improved their wider presentation and training skills, but had also boosted their confidence delivering training to their colleagues.

“It’s developed my training and presentation skills – the experience of planning and delivering it and taking feedback, and working to do amendments when things haven’t worked quite right [has been beneficial].” (Lead practitioner, West Sussex)

“The impact on me has been huge. The ELDP has given me more confidence and given me skills to support other practitioners.” (Lead practitioner, Birmingham)

Increased confidence in communicating with parents about SLC development – in terms of how to support their child’s SLC development and also when raising concerns

Local practitioners in particular reported that the training enhanced their abilities to communicate supportive messages to parents and when raising concerns regarding their child’s SLC development.

“When you talk to parents obviously the last thing they want to hear is that there is something wrong with their child, and using those tools enables me to have those conversations without it seeming like I’m being judgemental.” (Local practitioner, West Sussex)

Increasing knowledge and awareness

Both lead and local practitioners reported that the training led to tangible improvements in their knowledge of SLC and allowed them to become more aware of effective means to communicate with parents and children. Training sessions also brought together local practitioners, creating an informal space where ideas and best practice could be shared.

Refreshing and re-packaging knowledge regarding SLC development for experienced practitioners

Experienced practitioners reported that the training reinvigorated their enthusiasm for SLC development, and provided them with innovative new frames for knowledge they had already acquired.

“For me personally, it restored my confidence. Although a lot of the stuff I had maybe heard before through my training and my degree, it gave me more confidence to believe in what I thought.” (Local practitioner, West Sussex)

“Where to start! The ELDP has had a phenomenal impact on me. Getting that underpinning of what understanding means, what is speech, what is language, what is communication, what would happen if it wasn’t there? You do need the underpinning knowledge to understand what the issue is... I have that now.” (Lead practitioner, Sandwell)

Increased awareness of different ways of relating and communicating more effectively with children

In multiple cases, the training provided local practitioners with new means of communicating with children. In some cases of this, the wider impact of this was felt throughout the settings:

“Practitioners are noticing children’s communication more, they notice the quieter children and realise that just because they are not vocal doesn’t mean they don’t have a voice... they can understand the different ways the child might be communicating, for example, by making eye contact and the little hand which reaches out.” (Lead practitioner, Merton)

“It made me realise how much you question [children] when you shouldn’t really, that you should be more open ended. You should play alongside them. Let them see you

play as well rather than directing them. It is about using body language, being down at the same level of children.” (Local practitioner, West Sussex)

“It is making [local] practitioners mindful of how people communicate and how important understanding is, instead of just saying “they are not talking”. It is about the [local] practitioners understanding why children are not talking and the different ways they communicate.” (Lead practitioner, Sandwell)

Providing a valuable forum to exchange ideas and knowledge

Lead and local practitioners report that the programme enhanced and consolidated their existing knowledge. Through making links with other practitioners, several felt more able to link theory and practice about SLC development. ELDP training sessions also provided an opportunity for professionals from different specialisms to mix and share good practice.

“There was a real mix of professionals on those courses- I don’t think they get to meet usually: to spend a day talking about issues and thinking about things, developing a joint understanding [...] and breaking down barriers.” (Lead practitioner, North Lancashire)

Changing practice and encouraging innovation

Several practitioners reported that the training inspired them to introduce ‘new ideas’ and ‘fresh ways of thinking’ into their practice, along with repackaging messages that they have been delivering for a while.

Along with these incremental innovations, the training is reported to have led directly to decreased referrals to SLT services, increased time for delivery of training regarding SLC development, and changes to classroom layouts to make the environment more communication friendly.

Improved ability to assess SLC problems

The ELDP has provided local practitioners with a greater understanding of when it is appropriate to refer a child to a SLT. As a result of this, some practitioners report making fewer inappropriate referrals.

“There has definitely been an increase in confidence, practitioners are making more referrals. I think the training just... it’s having it explained and then as managers feeling more confident to feed back down to staff [and say] ‘these are the new referral forms, if you need support let us know and it’s really important that we do them.” (Practitioner, Merton)

“I think it enhanced your confidence to be able to fill out the section [in 2 year progress check] on communication. And in filling out referrals to speech and language, I think a lot of what we got from the courses we can use when completing referrals.” (Nursery manager (practitioner), East Cheshire)

ELDP resources allowed practitioners to shift more time from planning to delivery of training

In Gateshead local practitioners welcomed the inclusion of suggested activities to deliver with children using the ELDP resources, so that the local practitioners do not have to “think on the spot” or pre-plan as extensively to implement the learning.

Furthermore, some of the resources have gone up on display around settings to constantly remind local practitioners of the content of the sessions. For example one nursery has put the poster with ‘10 talking tips’ up in the staffroom.

Changes to classroom settings and nursery layout to reduce distractions and provide quiet areas for language learning

In Essex and East Cheshire, practitioners have redesigned their learning environments to better aid SLC support. In Essex, learning environments have been modified to make spaces more communication friendly. In East Cheshire, the nursery's lead practitioner identified early impacts around practice change, such as reduced dummy use via the 'lolly' activity; the development of communication friendly spaces; and turning off radios / DVDs to reduce background noise in learning environments.

Increased take-up of further learning and accreditation

Participating in the ELDP has encouraged practitioners to enrol in further academic or practical courses to enhance their learning, and even gain further formal accreditation.

In North Lancashire, the ELDP is linked to the level three award for supporting speech and language, and lead practitioners have been able to team up with the local college to support access to the training for practitioners who have taken part in the ELDP. The ELDP, along with other training courses that the early years steering group provides, aligns well with the level three accreditation standards. Practitioners who accessed the ELDP and other relevant courses could then access the assessment from the college to gain the accreditation without the need for significant additional training.

Parents

In each of the case studies there was either direct or anecdotal evidence of parental impacts following the ELDP training. These are explored below. The positive practitioner responses to the ELDP echoed the attitudes of parents, many of whom changed their communication with their children following ELDP guidance.

Increased confidence in supporting their child's SLC and improved confidence to use language in play

Multiple parents reported that following the training, they had modified their language and approach when communicating with their child:

"It has helped me to think about how you speak to a child, especially with that age group. I found it really interesting – you add a word onto what your child is saying, rather than saying a whole long sentence to your child and expecting them to understand. That has been really interesting. Since I have been shortening my sentences to match my child's, I have found he is actually starting to communicate a lot more." (Parent, North Lancashire)

In Birmingham, one parent had a three year old daughter with Down's Syndrome. Because the parent had limited English, she was given a one-to-one 'Chatterbags' session to attend and the children's centre provided a translator to go through the resources with her. During this session, the parent said she learnt to play with her child, and did things such as looking at plastic toys and learning the names, and playing 'peek-a-boo'. The parent told us that she feels she now can play with her child, which she wasn't able to do before and also that her daughter has learnt to say more words, and when they go shopping can identify different fruit and vegetables.

Increased awareness of age appropriate language abilities

One lead practitioner described the training as leading to “light bulb moments” for parents and carers. This practitioner described how some parents had previously given their children dummies, even if they had been told that it is not good for SLC development. When it was explained that this gives a message to the child that it is bad to make noises and this might make them unwilling to try to speak, this helped the parents to understand the importance of not using a dummy.

In East Cheshire, one parent talked about ‘Chatter Matters’ resources resulting in them changing the way they spent time and communicated with their child:

“It really came to light for us as parents when the nursery gave us the Chatter Matters DVD – they had it on display as you came in the entrance... they gave us a booklet and DVD to take away so we watched that one weekend, and after watching that it really brought it home to us how he was behind and what we as parents maybe should have been doing... it just highlighted a lot of different things in the DVD... We did become aware that maybe we were all talking too fast with his older sibling and he just got lost in it all...” (Parent of 2 ¾ year old with SLC needs, East Cheshire)

Introducing other initiatives and key messages regarding child development to parents

In several cases, the ELDP training was used as an entry point or as a source of inspiration to deliver other resources or advice on issues surrounding language development or childcare more broadly.

“We are even working with pregnant mums- e.g. getting prams that face the right way – ways to support parents and carers to recognise and respond to their baby’s earliest communication. That is not necessarily based on ELDP resources, but the ELDP raised the awareness to make people receptive to it.” (Lead practitioner, Essex)

Children

In 8 of the case studies, direct improvements to children’s SLC had been noted. In the remaining case studies practitioners expected to see such impacts emerge over coming months.

Reports of both anecdotal and measured improvement in SLC abilities

In several cases, practitioners were developing tools to capture the impact of the ELDP on children’s SLC.

“Looking at the children who left us in July, looking at their assessments, their language skills were above average, and that was because of staff being able to do the training and being able to deliver the ELDP”. (Practitioner, Birmingham)

In Bolton, the lead practitioner has been monitoring the impact of the programme by collecting data on a particular cohort of children working below age-related expectations within each setting. The children were measured at baseline (before the ELDP training) and are now being monitored at regular intervals, to cover the 18 months from the start to end of the programme. The Lead Practitioner and their team analysed the data for interim reporting and could already see an improvement in the children’s development. They were optimistic that this trend would continue and lead to further improvements. The lead practitioner also explained how one of the settings involved in the programme had recently had an Ofsted inspection that recorded improvements in the interactions between practitioners and children; and this was acknowledged as being due to the programme.

Evidence from Merton children's centres shows improvements in the language development of individual children who are measured before and six months after their parents attend ELDP courses. Results show that 81% of children whose parents attend these courses improve their expressive language beyond expectations for a 6-month period. Although it is difficult to specifically unpick the impact of the ELDP, the lead practitioner was confident that the programme had 'added value' to their work, enhancing the confidence, knowledge and skills of practitioners, and in turn, parents.

Parents report increased talkativeness

Lead and local practitioners reported increased talkativeness and evidence of progress for individual children. For example, a practitioner in Merton explained how one child who previously had very delayed language development and was not making eye contact was now trying to talk and using new words.

Cascade approaches

In each case study site, the model used for ELDP cascade was slightly different, as was the level of support received from local authorities. Often the format of cascading was adapted and modified to best suit the locations and diaries of different groups of practitioners. This section summarises some common themes relating to how the ELDP was cascaded in different locations.

Coordinated by a central team

In several cases, including the larger areas of Birmingham and Essex, cascading was coordinated and led by a central team who were trained and then delivered the training to local practitioners.

In Birmingham the Foundation Years Parenting Support team takes a central role in coordinating the ELDP training, including organising the cascade training sessions, booking venues and ordering and organising the ELDP resources for lead practitioners and practitioners to use.

Keeping an overview of which lead practitioners have gone on to deliver training and following up with those who haven't has meant that messages are cascaded to the maximum number of practitioners.

Embedded within wider approaches

In some cases, ELDP training and resources were embedded within wider programmes or approaches to SLC development. For example in Merton, the lead practitioner integrated the ELDP resources into their existing programmes 'Chitter Chatter' and 'Toddler and Talk', which are provided in local children's centres to parents and families. The ELDP has been embedded as part of a broader programme, with cascade activities that allow practitioners to put the principles and resources into practice on a day-to-day basis. This is part of the reason the reach of the programme has so been so wide in Merton.

In Cornwall, the lead practitioners felt strongly that the ELDP aligned well with other local language development training programmes, and formed a key part of their overall approach to early language development support.

Using practical activities as part of the training

In Bolton, the design of the cascaded training has been key to the programme's success: using feedback from an initial session, the lead practitioners decided to include practical activities. For example, in one session they use a lollipop to show the impact of dummies on

the development of speech, and in another session they use an apple to demonstrate the value of active learning:

“Participants are given an apple, asked to cut it, taste it and describe it (so they have a long list of words about the taste, texture etc.). Then they are given a colour photo and asked to describe it (so the list of words they can use becomes shorter), then they are given a black and white photo, and finally just the word ‘apple’. This is to show the importance of giving children real life experiences when learning language”.
(Practitioner, Bolton)

Using a ‘second tier cascade’

In several settings, following delivery of training by the lead practitioner, local practitioners were encouraged to deliver training to their colleagues within their work setting, creating a ‘second tier cascade’. In Gateshead, one lead practitioner was asked to deliver training around early years’ communication to a chain of five nurseries in the area, who then used this as an opportunity to further cascade the ELDP.

Critical success factors

Several key enablers or critical success factors were identified by case study participants. These are summarised below.

Integration with existing initiatives in place locally, or having a clear structure for sustainable implementation

In Sandwell, the ‘Time to Talk’ steering group was seen as an effective governance arrangement to oversee local cascade of the ELDP, giving the programme a high profile and ensuring integration with other early years programmes in the area. Similarly, Merton have integrated the ELDP into their existing programme of SLC development support, cascading the programme to a high number of practitioners who have been delivering two targeted programmes to parents and children within children’s centres.

Support and steering from the local authority

Backing from the local authority ensures that the programme aligns with other local activity and strategic priorities. This can also help to free up practitioner capacity to cascade the training to others and provide funds for resources:

“Our links with Birmingham [City Council] have been great, they have produced all the resources and put them all together to facilitate the training and the exercises... it’s invaluable because it takes away the onus on us [as lead practitioners] to do this, which would have been very time intensive. Time is precious and so that has been really valuable.” (Lead practitioner, Birmingham)

Similarly in Sandwell, the ELDP has the backing and support from senior management within the local authority, with the local authority purchasing ELDP resources. Having standardised resources available in each setting has facilitated the cascade, ensuring consistency but allowing flexibility in local use.

Capacity and experience of I CAN trainers

The pace and structure of the training and the approachable style of the I CAN trainers contributed to lead practitioner positive experiences of the ELDP training:

“The trainer was really good and clear, we knew what was expected and she offered support for afterwards... It was really good to have the resources there and to go through it all.” (Lead practitioner, Cornwall)

Establishing monitoring systems to track impacts and cascade activities over time

Birmingham City Council is aware of the need to evidence impact and outcomes of the ELDP in order to sustain the programme. They are therefore piloting an Early Years Foundation Stage progress and profile monitoring tool, which they will use to collect data on the impact of the ELDP on children.

In Sandwell, qualified teachers in each children’s centre cluster are responsible for sending out monitoring forms to capture details of how the ELDP resources are being used after training. In Cornwall the lead practitioners have plans to visit settings to follow up on staff progress with cascading.

Joint working between children’s organisations

The cascade model has proven successful due in part to the joint working between the Early Childhood Service team and the SLT team in West Sussex. For example, the Early Childhood Service has wide links with early years’ settings and was therefore able to recruit and secure participation from a large number and range of practitioners.

Building relationships between children’s centres and local PVIs

One lead practitioner told us that it has historically been difficult to engage with some PVIs and secure their involvement in training and initiatives. One reason for this is that they can worry about sharing good practice with competitors in the private market. Being able to offer the PVIs some free training helped to improve relationships with them by creating a chance to meet up, and fostering feelings of goodwill.

One children’s centre delivered ELDP training for staff at a local library. The library staff then attended a session at the children’s centre and encouraged parents to sign up for their library cards. The library benefitted by having more users; it is beneficial for children because they have better access to books; and parents can receive support from library staff.

Personalising and adapting training sessions to settings

Some lead practitioners reported that the delivery team has spent a great deal of time tweaking and personalising the training programme, and this has meant that the training has been more engaging for local practitioners and better suited local circumstances.

Dedicated team of trainers to provide longer term follow-up support

In settings where there were dedicated staff to provide support during training and follow up at designated intervals afterwards, practitioners reported positive impacts.

“I think we have had more impact with the training because it is my whole role to do it. Others try to get the training delivered over 6 months, then that is it, whereas I can go out to each children’s centre and support them every week.” (Lead practitioner, Essex)

Having a dedicated post to organise training and book venues

In Birmingham having a dedicated post to organise the training sessions, invite practitioners and book venues was seen as essential to delivering the ELDP over such a large area.

Creating action plans at the end of learning, with follow up support

Across Birmingham, following the ELDP training local practitioners are asked to complete an action plan to consider how they will use the resources in their practice, and they then order the resources identified on their action plan. The lead practitioners undertake two, six and twelve week follow up calls to ensure the practitioners are implementing the strategies identified on their action plan and embedding the ELDP principles into practice. During the follow up call, achievements are celebrated and any issues or concerns raised, especially if practitioners are having difficulty moving practice forward. If support is required visits to settings can be arranged by the lead practitioner.

Training sessions that enable parents to use the activities with children

In North Lancashire, some practitioners modified the ELDP workshop for parents to deliver it over three sessions rather than two. This is because they wanted to add an extra session in which parents could bring in their children and practice some of the things that they had been learning about under the practitioners' supervision. This was felt to be important because they thought that actually implementing the learning would help the concepts to "sink in" more effectively.

Providing training at appropriate times

In Cornwall, the lead practitioners felt it was a challenge to schedule convenient times for training sessions. They were mindful of how much training local practitioners were already undertaking, and were keen to avoid over-burdening them. Similarly in Essex, running sessions for child-minders during evenings and weekends helped to improve attendance.

"The child minders have absolutely gone berserk for it – [they have] really loved it. We think obviously that the offer of it being free training has been an incentive. But the majority can't access training during the week, so I have delivered it on Saturdays for them, and those sessions have been fully booked." (Lead practitioner, Essex)

Making resources available to parents

In East Cheshire ELDP resources were made available to parents. Parents reported that the 'Chatter Matters' leaflet and DVD resources were particularly helpful. One reported changing their behaviour to ensure that they spent more one to one time with their child and are now talking to their child more when they go shopping, and other parents also reported behaviour changes as a result of their increased knowledge about SLC development.

Transferable learning points

Whilst the ELDP was delivered and cascaded differently across the case study sites, there were transferable learning points which could be considered to ensure further successful roll-out of the programme, or to inform future similar programmes.

Variable duration of training

Providing longer and more thorough training for practitioners without SLC development experience was suggested as a potential improvement to the programme, to allow them to fully familiarise themselves with the resources and practice delivery. However, more experienced or knowledgeable practitioners may only need shorter training sessions.

In one site lead practitioners were concerned that the length of the ELDP training caused initial challenges when cascading, because lead practitioners were not as familiar with the resources and structure of the course (due to it running for two days and having a lot of aspects to learn) as they would have liked to have been. This indicates that lead practitioners

may benefit from advice that they need to allow sufficient preparation time in advance of cascading the programme.

Linking childcare settings

It was suggested that the programme could foster more sustainable links between childcare settings. Local practitioners enjoyed having the opportunity to work with and hear from others, and could potentially have benefited from further local partnership working.

Increasing practitioner / parent contact

Practitioners from one site commented that the training did not include any direct work with parents and children, and therefore the impact on this group depends on the inclination and capacity of individual local practitioners to share and implement learning. Incorporating parents into parts of the practitioner cascaded training may help to deliver consistent messages and help practitioners/ parents to be “on the same page” to effectively support children’s SLC development.

Incorporating more trained practitioners

If cascading relies on a few lead practitioners who have been trained by I CAN, there could be limits to expansion. For example, one centre said that they had really appreciated the ELDP training that they received, and wanted training to be provided to other members of staff, but due to lead practitioner capacity they had not been able to schedule extra training in yet. Others reported that lead practitioners had been unable to cascade the training as originally planned due to competing work commitments. Whilst some areas adopted a ‘second tier’ cascade approach, it may be useful to further encourage this approach across all areas, to reduce the burden on lead practitioners. This might also offer opportunities for developing the skills and confidence of local practitioners whilst they cascade the training to others.

A ‘second tier’ cascade can work well, with local practitioners actively sharing knowledge among their peers. For this to work, local practitioners need support and buy in from the manager at their setting, as knowledge sharing takes time. They also require some active engagement from other staff members e.g. to attend meetings where knowledge could be shared.

Securing local authority buy in

Some areas benefited from strong support from the local authority for the programme and its cascade. We suggest that it may be useful in future to attempt to garner this strategic support up front, to maximise the chance for strategic alignment with other local programmes aimed at child development and SLC support, and also to potentially provide resources to support the cascade.