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Final Report

Conversations about language and literacy: promoting equity and attainment through engagement



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Main objectives and context

Closing the poverty-related gap in literacy attainment between the most and least deprived children is a key priority of the Scottish Government. Recent figures reveal that the gap is proving resistant to change (OECD Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), 2015; Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, 2017). The goal of this programme was to create more opportunities in Scotland for multidisciplinary exchange between academic researchers, policy-makers, practitioners and communities in order to tackle this attainment challenge. The need for this type of exchange between existing hubs of knowledge in Scotland has been highlighted by the OECD (2015)¹:

With this in mind, our programme was designed with the following aims:

1. To break down disciplinary barriers in relation to the poverty-related attainment challenge in literacy
2. To explore and evaluate multidisciplinary methods of language and literacy support in Scotland
3. To unpack approaches and attitudes to literacy engagement among Scottish children and their families

Insights resulting from the programme

To achieve these aims, a broad range of stakeholders from research and practice were brought together in a series of workshops that also took care to include the voices of children living in Scotland.

The topics of our workshops were ordered so that insights from earlier workshops could be carried forward to inform later ones. The attainment gap was thus challenged systematically in a developmental sequence from preschool language to literacy acquisition and growth, with further equity issues in language and literacy being examined in relation to EAL/multilingual children, before a final focus on inspiring all Scottish children to read for pleasure.

Workshop Series:

Workshop 1: Developing and enhancing early language through reading (December, 2017)

Speakers: Dr Claudine Bowyer-Crane, Education, University of York; Susan Docherty, Development Officer, Family Learning, Education Scotland; Dr Lynne Duncan, Psychology, University of Dundee; Conny Gollek, Education, University of West of Scotland; Michaela Howell, Director, Better Start Bradford; Alison Low, Community Learning & Development, Dundee City Council; Catriona Mackenzie, Policy Manager, "Read, Write, Count" and Literacy, Scottish Government; Kim McRae & Lynne Blair, One Parent Families Scotland; Sian Neil, Senior Education Officer, Early Years, Education Scotland; Dr Edward Sosu, Education, University of Strathclyde; Catriona Wallace, Head of Early Years, Scottish Book Trust.



The importance of the early years in the development of language and literacy skills was recognised. Interdisciplinary knowledge exchange took place around innovation in approaches to parental engagement and nurturing initial language in different contexts. Barriers to early learning were given consideration as well as the improvement of methods for following and scaffolding progress. Therefore, discussions about research on early intervention, family learning and home-school connections

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015) *Improving schools in Scotland: an OECD perspective*. Report, OECD Paris

formed the basis for dialogue about effective early language and literacy support from developmental, educational and community perspectives.

Workshop 2: Improving early reading acquisition and development (January, 2018)

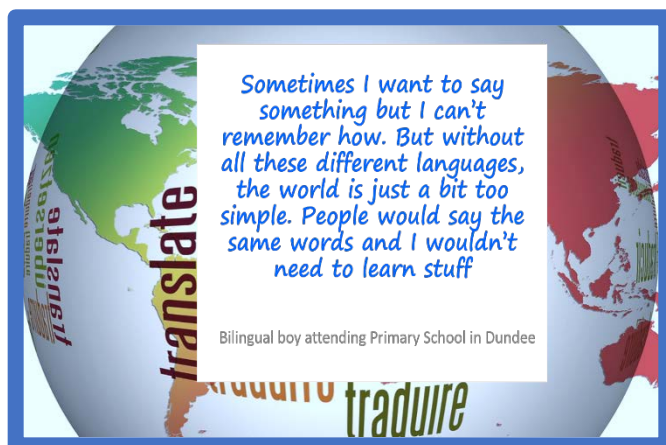
Speakers: Helen Fairlie, Education Scotland; Simon Kelly, Head Teacher, Alexandra Parade Primary School; Catriona Mackenzie, Literacy Policy Manager, Scottish Government; Dr Sarah McGeown, Education, University of Edinburgh, Prof Rob Savage, Education, UCL; Dr Laura Shapiro, Psychology, Aston University; Dr Rhona Stainthorp, Psychology, University of Reading.

Early success in reading is a strong predictor of later reading outcomes, therefore it is crucial children receive research-informed reading instruction from the start of school. At this workshop, talks by Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and a local Head Teacher, outlined Scottish policy and practice in this area. Following this, research was shared from academics focusing on the most effective instructional approaches to support early reading and spelling. Roundtable discussions followed, with mixed groups working on questions following from the earlier talks. For example: *How can we achieve better equity? How can we ensure research informs policy, professional learning and initial teacher education in Scotland?*



Workshop 3: Understanding and supporting multilingual language and literacy (March, 2018)

Speakers: Dr Claudine Bowyer-Crane, Education, University of York; Dr Lynne Duncan, Psychology, University of Dundee; Helen Fairlie, Education Officer (Literacy and English), Education Scotland; Dr Yvonne Foley, Education, University of Edinburgh; Louise Glen, Senior Education Officer (Languages and Literacy), Education Scotland; Andrea Goh, Psychology, University of Dundee; Prof. Antonella Sorace, Bilingualism Matters/Developmental Linguistics, University of Edinburgh; Prof Enlli Thomas, Education, University of Bangor; Mandy Watts, Development Officer (ESOL), Education Scotland.



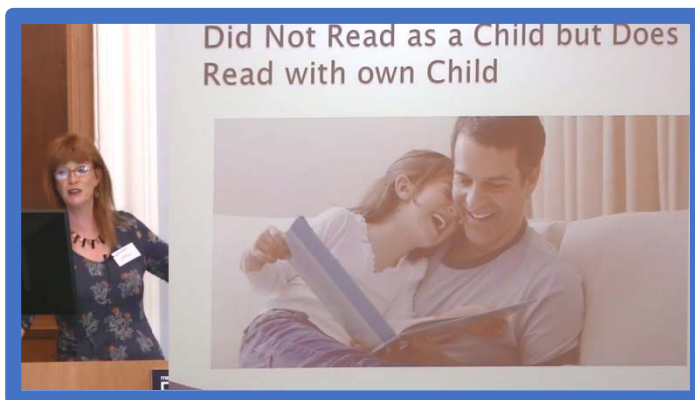
The opportunities and advantages of multilingualism in learning and social interaction came across strongly from the discussions. Dialogue focused around how to co-create evidence-based methods of instruction and intervention for multilingual language and literacy development. Supporting practitioners and families to foster literacy transfer between languages, family learning and continued vocabulary growth were the themes that emerged in relation to EAL support, Gaelic Medium Education and the 1+2 approach to language learning.

Workshop 4: Motivating and sustaining reading for pleasure (April, 2018)

Speakers: Marc Lambert, CEO, Scottish Book Trust; Dr Rachael Levy, Education, University of Sheffield; Catriona MacKenzie, Literacy Policy Manager, Scottish Government; Dr Sarah McGeown, Education, University of Edinburgh; Prof Gemma Moss, Education, UCL; Dr Anne Teravainen, Research and Evaluation, National Literacy Trust.

This workshop also included sharing of practices, with practitioners from: Forthview Primary School, Inverclyde Academy, Glenrothes High School, Dalgety Bay Primary School, Woodmill High School, Levenmouth Academy and Fife Cultural Trust.

In this workshop, the benefits of reading for pleasure were discussed, with insights from the Scottish Book Trust and Scottish Government into current work in Scotland in this area (e.g., First Ministers Reading Challenge). Furthermore, theoretical work and empirical research by academics exploring reading for pleasure from early childhood to adolescence was shared. A carousel style session provided an opportunity for practitioners to share their work around promoting reading for pleasure in the primary and secondary school classroom, before final discussions among all workshop participants.



Main outcomes and impact

The immediate outcome from the programme has been the series of presentations by the invited speakers, which informed and motivated the discussions at each of the workshops. The slides from these presentations have been made available to a wider audience via the SUll website. Accompanying videos have now been produced and edited by the *Technology Enhancement Education Unit* at the University of Edinburgh.

A key benefit of this workshop series was the creation of novel connections between stakeholders with shared interests within Scottish language and literacy research and practice. Indeed, our application had at its core the goal of establishing a reciprocal knowledge exchange network to tackle the language and literacy attainment challenge. The new network that has been established is called *Language and Literacy: communication, collaboration, co-production* (LALco).



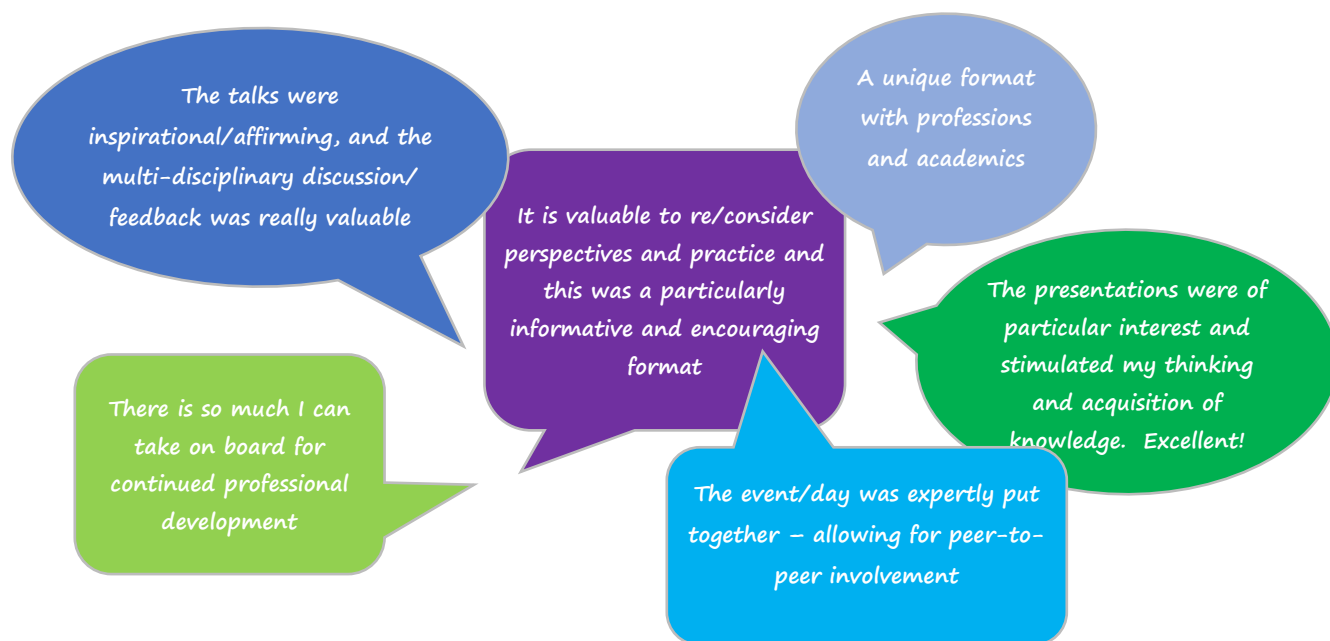
A website (www.lalco.org.uk) has been built to host the network and to disseminate the presentation videos and other programme outputs as they appear. It is hoped that this will be an important step towards sustaining the momentum created by this SUll programme. The new membership uptake since this website was launched recently has been very positive.

A number of other outcomes have also resulted directly from this programme. For example:

1. Drawing on findings from the SU11 workshops, Duncan and McGeown submitted a response to the Education and Skills Committee inquiry into the attainment and achievement of school aged children experiencing poverty. Details of the submission can be found here: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/107990.aspx>.
2. Duncan and McGeown shared details of the SU11 project with the National Literacy Network, an Education Scotland network which links all practitioners across Scotland with a remit for supporting literacy.
3. McGeown has started to involve non-academic partners, met through SU11, in research funding applications. She recently received funding for a project (Growing Up A Reader) in collaboration with the Scottish Book Trust and has submitted a second funding application following discussions with practitioners during Workshop 4. Included in the funding application is an Expert Advisory Group, comprised solely of non-academic partners met during the SU11 workshops.

Our feedback questionnaires from the workshop events were generally very positive; workshop participants appreciated the format of the day, which drew upon the expertise of all those attending and involved insights from policy, practice and research. The combination of talks and targeted discussion was well received.

Some examples of the open-ended comments received from participants:



Overall, the feedback suggests that the programme achieved its aims of breaking down disciplinary barriers in relation to the poverty-related attainment challenge in literacy and exploring and evaluating multidisciplinary methods of language and literacy support in Scotland.

Key recommendations for end user / policy communities

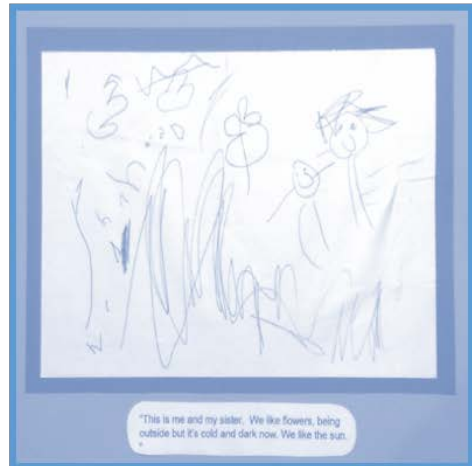
- **Coordination across stakeholders**
 - Clear support for the establishment of a network to maintain multidisciplinary dialogue around language and literacy development in Scotland
 - This dialogue would be facilitated by developing a common language for discussion
 - Building relationships is key: within families; between families and organisations; and between different organisations in partnership.
- **Intervention quality and sustainability**
 - Early intervention focused on language and literacy produces benefits not only for school attainment but also for children's future health and wellbeing.
 - Stakeholders require support to select interventions to ensure that high-quality educational experiences are delivered. Examples of issues that remain challenging are:
 - How can promising interventions move from research design conditions to real life?
 - What are the most effective ways of evaluating best practice?
 - How can evidence-based interventions be supported to become sustainable?
 - Action research based around links with Universities could integrate research and practice to produce more effective interventions for the Scottish context.
- **Access to research findings**
 - Teachers, third sector organisations and community groups would like greater access to research findings
 - Increasing research-informed content about language and literacy development could add to the quality of practitioner training and continuing professional development.
- **Methods for communicating professional knowledge**
 - Reliable methods are needed to support practitioners in their screening of children for early intervention; and for stimulating discussions among practitioners and families about language and literacy.
 - Increased opportunity for stakeholders to co-produce academic research would be valuable.

Planned follow up activities

The LALco network website will continue to be populated with materials in collaboration with the network of stakeholders. Currently, innovative ways of summarising research using video and info-graphic formats are being explored for use on the website via University teaching activities around applied research.

The goal is to attract funding for further events aimed at knowledge exchange and the co-production of research. Future funding will be based around the model of an Expert Advisory Group involving practitioners, policy makers and families. These connections should be ongoing via the LALco network

Findings from this knowledge exchange programme will continue to be written up including studies of parents' voices in the early years (Workshop 1) and the experience of bilingual children (Workshop 3) to further explore approaches and attitudes to literacy engagement among Scottish children and their families.



To cite:

Duncan, L.G., & McGeown, S.P. (2019). *Conversations about language and literacy: Promoting equity and attainment through engagement*. Final Report. Scottish Universities Insight Institute: Glasgow, UK.