



Leading Beyond the Classroom: Empowering Leaders and Practitioners to Implement Evidence-Informed Approaches

Understanding the Need and the Challenge

Across our CMAT, oracy has emerged as a key priority. Many children join our setting with limited oral language skills. Educators have observed that this can be a barrier to learning across all areas of the EYFS curriculum. It also affects children's self-esteem, ability to self-regulate, and capacity to build relationships.

Leaders and practitioners identified a need for professional development to expand their toolkit of evidence-informed approaches—strategies that are both intentional and flexible. The goal was to strengthen children's word learning, comprehension, narrative skills, higher-order thinking, and conceptual vocabulary.

We also recognised the need to share approaches that ensure all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, receive high-quality foundational skills in communication and language.

Our Aim

To utilise evidence-informed approaches to improve children's oral language and to enhance educators' skills and confidence in applying these approaches intentionally and flexibly across daily practice.

Our Journey

Communication and Language has always been a priority for us, given the high number of children with low starting points in this area. However, we wanted to understand:

What would make the greatest impact? What new evidence-informed approaches could we try?

We chose to take part in an **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)** trial of Talking Time — a universal oral language programme underpinned by evidence-based, language-supporting strategies delivered through five high-quality texts.

Educators received training and were allocated mentors who provided both online and face-to-face support. The training focused on specific language-learning strategies and introduced a reflective tool to support delivery and embed these approaches into daily routines.



Sue Murphy

Teacher / Early Years
Lead at SS Peter and
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My Early Years journey began in 1986 when I qualified as an NNEB. At 42, I completed a degree in Early Childhood Studies, followed by a PGCE in Early Primary at 44. After a year teaching Year 3, I joined SS Peter and Paul, where I have since enjoyed teaching both Nursery and Reception.



Key strategies included:

- Teaching and modelling new vocabulary
- Interactive reading
- Collaborative talk
- Modelling high-quality language

Weekly EYFS phase meetings offered an opportunity for educators to share practice, reflect on progress, and identify next steps.



Insights of Impact

"A school development priority within EYFS provision was to use evidence-informed practice and the EEF research project Talking Time to enhance children's communication and language, and to deepen educators' understanding of the most effective ways to do this."

"Parents commented that children were talking about their Talking Time texts at home, and were surprised by how much information their children could recall and share."

"Staff approached shared reading in a completely different way and were both pleased and surprised by the difference it made to children's engagement, responses, and interaction with the texts."

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Signs of Impact

Impact One

Educators reported being able to use a wider range of strategies to enhance children's vocabulary, communication, understanding, and higher-order thinking during shared book reading.

Impact Two

Children's engagement and curiosity around shared book reading increased significantly. Their developing vocabulary and conceptual understanding became evident in their daily interactions.

Impact Three

Educators observed that children's enhanced communication skills improved their interactions with peers. There were more "serve and return" conversations, greater use of social communication strategies such as turn-taking, and increased use of Makaton signs alongside spoken language. Children also began to label their emotions more effectively when resolving conflict.

Looking Ahead

Our experience with Talking Time has shown us the power of evidence-informed professional development. By investing in high-quality training and embedding strategies into everyday practice, we have seen tangible improvements in both educator confidence and children's communication outcomes.

As we continue this journey, our next step is to build on this momentum—sharing what we've learned with others and continuing to refine our approaches so that every child has the opportunity to thrive through the power of language.

Find Out More

Find out more about evidence-informed approaches to early years practice in the [EEF Early Years Evidence Store](https://www.eef.org.uk/early-years-evidence-store)