

Talking Matters - making a significant impact on children's receptive and expressive language

Elklan, the speech and language trainers for education staff and parents, delivers accredited courses and programmes for early years settings, schools and other settings working to support children's speech, language and communication.

The Department of Human Communication Sciences at the University of Sheffield has independently evaluated Elklan's *Talking Matters* programme.

Funded by the Department for Education, *Talking Matters* was conducted across 128 nurseries, preschools and children's centres in six areas of England.

This short briefing provides an introduction into the evaluation report titled *Evaluation of the Elkan Talking Matters Programme* published July 2017.

About the programme

A total of 101 practitioners who work with children from one-and-a-half to three years received accredited *Talking Matters* training and development, either face to face or through e-learning. These practitioners subsequently cascaded training to a further 1,329 staff.

The aims of the training were:

- To improve practitioner knowledge and confidence in supporting children develop their speech, language and communication
- To improve outcomes in children's speech, language and communication.

In addition to the training, Elklan enabled practitioners at the nurseries, preschools and children's centres to implement changes to their settings to develop the speech, language and communication of all children but particularly those with an identified need or at risk of delay. Once changes had been introduced, settings were audited and could then be accredited as an Elklan Communication-Friendly Early Years Setting.

In total, the *Talking Matters* programme reached 8,964 children.

Elklan evaluated the effects of the *Talking Matters* programme on the staff's knowledge and confidence using 'before and after' questionnaires. The Department of Human Communication Sciences at the University of Sheffield investigated the outcomes for children using a face-to-face, direct-play-based assessment of language comprehension and expression, the Pre-School Language Scales 5th Edition.¹

The *Talking Matters* programme was initially developed for staff in early years settings by Elklan in 2015. The programme built on the recommendations from Elklan's involvement in the Early Language Development Programme (ELDP), which ran from 2011 to 2015.

The programme ran until March 2016 with data and analysis continuing until July / August 2016.

¹ (PLS-5) (Zimmerman, I., Steiner, V., Pond, R. 2014).

Following this, Elklan approached the project researchers in the Department of Human Communication Sciences (HCS) at the University of Sheffield to undertake an evaluation of the *Talking Matters* programme over 2016/17.

Key findings

- *Talking Matters* makes a statistically significant impact on children's receptive and expressive language.
- After completing *Talking Matters*, practitioners reported a highly significant statistical increase in their understanding of, and work to facilitate children's speech, language and communication.
- Children who received *Talking Matters* progressed by an average of seven months in their language development, whilst children in the control group progressed by only two months.
- Differences could be seen in both the children's ability to understand (receptive language) and their ability to use and combine words (expressive language).

Outcomes for staff

A total of 473 practitioners completed pre- and post-*Talking Matters* questionnaires comprising 13 questions regarding their knowledge and confidence in supporting children's speech, language and communication

Practitioners who had completed the *Talking Matters* programme reported a highly significant statistical increase in their confidence in supporting children's speech language and communication development and demonstrated increased knowledge and use of a wider range of appropriate strategies.

Practitioners rated themselves before and after *Talking Matters* on 13 questions, they showed improvements in all 13 areas, with mean scores increasing from 26.21 to 37.27, an increase of some 42%.

"Staff in our early-years settings who have been part of Talking Matters are well equipped to support children's speech, language and communication."

Examples of strategies that practitioners used after *Talking Matters* that they didn't use before:

- Modelling (38%)
- Waiting for the child to talk (37%)
- Focusing on verbs or action words (30%)
- Using short words and sentences (27%)
- Focusing on describing words (23%)
- Talking about what the child is looking at/doing (20%)
- Reflecting on the style of adult/child interaction (20%).

“Talking Matters has given me a much wider understanding of how to support children and their families with speech delay.”

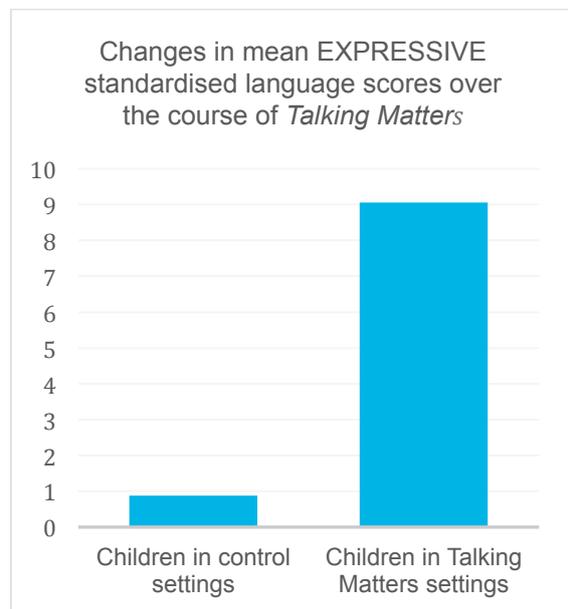
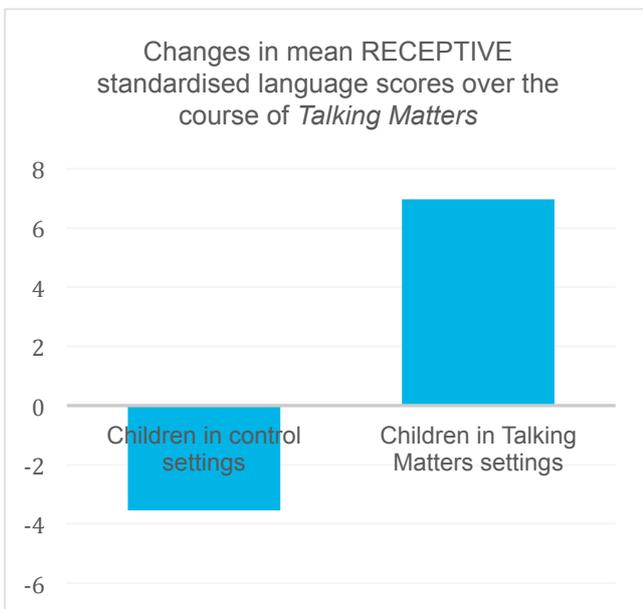
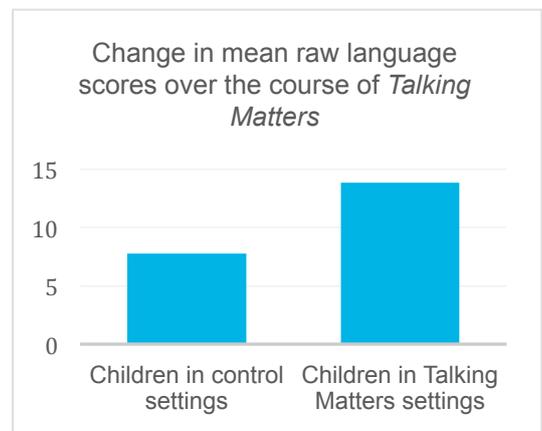
“The strategies promoted in the training definitely have a positive impact on developing the children’s speech, language and communication skills.”

“This is a fantastic opportunity to make a difference by empowering and extending practitioner knowledge, confidence and skills.”

Outcomes for children

Thirteen settings across four local authority areas were involved in the evaluation. This included nine settings who received the *Talking Matters* programme and four that did not and acted as controls. A total of 126 children, aged from 16-35 months, were assessed prior to *Talking Matters* from these settings, of which 87 children were available and therefore reassessed approximately six months later, after the end of the trial.

The results showed that *Talking Matters* had a statistically significant impact on both children’s receptive language, the spoken language they were able to understand, and their expressive language, how they were able to combine and use words to communicate with other people.



Children attending settings where *Talking Matters* was implemented made more progress in their receptive and expressive language scores compared with children in the control group – in the five months between the pre and post-programme testing, children who received *Talking Matters* progressed by an average of seven months in their language development, whilst children in the control group progressed by only two months.

Children are making rapid progress in their speech and language development. Staff benefit from skills acquired at recent training: they use a variety of questioning techniques, clear pronunciation as they introduce new words and make good use of opportunities to listen to and engage children in meaningful discussion.

Going forward

The feedback from *Talking Matters* has since been used to develop **Elklan's Communication Friendly Settings Programme**, an evidence-based, value for money intervention for children from 0-5 years.

Elklan Communication-Friendly Setting (CFSe) accreditation is awarded to Early Years settings (including nursery classes in mainstream schools) that have trained and supported all their staff in communication and language development.

They will also have shown evidence of embedding this knowledge in targeted interventions and through the implementation of a setting communication policy. Accreditation can be achieved in one year and is renewed after three years. It is the most cost-effective strategy available for capacity building in communication within settings.

This programme is being submitted to the What Works database of evidenced interventions to support children's speech, language and communication. What Works was developed by The Communication Trust, a coalition of over 50 voluntary organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication and is endorsed by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

In addition, Elklan offers the evidence-based **Speech and Language Support for 0-3s course**. This externally accredited training course equips staff to develop key communication skills in children, proved to ensure later success in school. This is the only accredited training in speech, language and communication that is aimed specifically at those working with babies and very young children.

Developed to support the revised EYFS framework, this course links research on early language development with best practice to give practitioners up-to-date theoretical knowledge and practical tools to promote communication. It provides practitioners with an externally verified and accredited level 2 or 3 award.

Further information

- The full academic report, authored by Dr Judy Clegg and Carla Rohde, is available to download from: <https://elklantraining.worldsecuresystems.com/reviews/evaluation-reports>
- Further information on the Elklan Communication Friendly Settings Programme is available from: www.elklan.co.uk/information/commissioners-schools/0-5yrs/becoming-an-elklan-communication-friendly-early-years-setting



- Further information on the Elklan Speech and Language Support for 0-3s course can be found here: www.elklan.co.uk/courses/practitioners/speech-and-language-support-for-0-3s

About Elklan

Elklan was established in 1999 in response to a demand for training to be delivered by speech and language therapists to education staff. Since 2001, Elklan has trained more than 1,400 speech and language therapists as tutors and 714 specialist teachers as co-tutors.

Elklan's hugely successful Train the Trainer programme has enabled training to be cascaded to more than 50,000 staff working in mainstream and specialist pre-school, primary and secondary education.

For more information visit: www.elklan.co.uk.

About University of Sheffield

With almost 27,000 of the brightest students from more than 140 countries, learning alongside more than 1,200 of the best academics from across the globe, the University of Sheffield is one of the world's leading universities.

A member of the UK's prestigious Russell Group of leading research-led institutions, Sheffield offers world-class teaching and research excellence across a wide range of disciplines. Global research partners and clients include Boeing, Rolls-Royce, Unilever, AstraZeneca, Glaxo SmithKline, Siemens and Airbus, as well as many UK and overseas government agencies and charitable foundations.

For further information, please visit: www.sheffield.ac.uk.

For more information about the Department of Human Communication Sciences please visit: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hcs>