

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Sheffield (UoS)
Unit of Assessment: 28B - Modern Languages and Linguistics: Linguistics
Title of case study: Widening opportunities for socially disadvantaged children through language and literacy support
1. Summary of the impact Children from areas of socio-economic disadvantage are at risk of underachievement at school because of impoverished language and literacy development. Teaching staff do not feel equipped to deal with the needs of these children, who may also have English as an additional language. Our research findings have heightened awareness of the relationship between social disadvantage, language and literacy. They have led directly to the development and delivery of programmes which can train teaching staff to enhance the spoken and written language skills of their pupils. These programmes also enable teaching staff to identify pupils who are in need of additional support thus increasing access to the curriculum and subsequent life choices.
2. Underpinning research Research into the relationship between language and social disadvantage among young children was pioneered in Sheffield by Ann Locke, senior lecturer in the Department of Human Communication Sciences (HCS) until her retirement in 2002. Teachers from local schools in areas of social disadvantage believed that their pupils had impoverished oral language and were unable to take advantage of literacy instruction. In 1998 Locke tested this hypothesis by undertaking one of the first longitudinal studies of its kind in the UK. Collaborating with the local education authority, she tested the language and cognitive development of 240 monolingual English children attending nurseries in a socially disadvantaged area of Sheffield. The teachers' views were confirmed: the children's non-verbal cognitive abilities were comparable to the general population, but over half of them had moderate to severe language delay [R1]. Following up these children through primary [R2] and secondary school, HCS researchers found that language and literacy delays persisted, particularly in vocabulary, and that primary pupils in 2006-7 performed significantly less well than the national average on assessments of English and literacy. This research has been extended to examine the persisting impact of social disadvantage on language, communication and literacy from early childhood through to adolescence and young adulthood. In 2008-10, we compared teenagers' achievements, attitudes and beliefs in two schools in Sheffield. The pupils in a socially disadvantaged part of Sheffield were less likely to fulfil their academic potential and to access language and literacy learning opportunities compared to pupils in a more affluent area. The disadvantaged pupils were aware of differences in language use between themselves and other teenagers, and between their own use of vocabulary and that of their teachers, whom they often found difficult to understand [R3]. A further study of the language, literacy, self esteem, and behaviour of socially disadvantaged teenagers excluded from their mainstream school revealed that they had previously unidentified language and literacy difficulties and needed specific support [R4]. A current study in collaboration with the Sheffield Youth Offending Service builds on this by investigating the functional language, communication and literacy skills of 51 young offenders (YOs) (age range 13-18 years) on court orders. As yet unpublished results show that the YOs, who on average have missed around 2.5 years of schooling, have performed poorly on standardised language and literacy measures, 75% of them scoring at least two standard deviations below the mean on two or more tests. Collaboration between HCS and ICAN, a national charity for children with communication impairments, led to an ESRC Case Studentship (awarded to Stackhouse and Clegg) for a unique follow-up study of disadvantaged adults who had attended an ICAN residential school for children with communication impairments. The study examined speech, language and literacy trajectories and highlighted the risk of unemployment and mental health difficulties. It also detailed the effects

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on the parents and siblings of having a child with communication difficulties in the family [R5].

Our experience of applied research has allowed us to identify the process and challenges of evaluating school based programmes [R6]. Funding from the University (Early Careers; PhD awards), charities (ICAN), and local services (The Learning Year; Youth Offending Service) has allowed us not only to carry out rigorous intervention projects ourselves but also to research how to evaluate intervention programmes in schools (see section 4)

3. References to the research

- R1. Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., Peers, I.(2002) Development and Disadvantage: Implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 37,1 3-15.
- R2. Locke, A., Ginsborg, J (2003) Spoken language in the early years: The cognitive and linguistic development of three- to five-year-old children from socio-economically deprived backgrounds *Educational and Child Psychology*, 20 (4) 68-79.
- R3. Spencer, S., Clegg, J., & Stackhouse, J. (2012) Language and Disadvantage: A comparison of the language abilities of adolescents from two different socioeconomic areas. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 47, 3, 274-284.
- R4. Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J., Finch, K., Nicholls, S., & Murphy, C. (2009). Language abilities of secondary age pupils at risk of exclusion from school: a preliminary report. *Child Language Teaching & Therapy*, 25, 1, 99-115
- R5. Clegg, J., Ansorge, L. & Stackhouse, J. (2012) Developmental communication impairments in adult life: documenting the life experiences of the adults and their parents from childhood through adolescence and into adult life. Invited paper. *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*. 43, 521-535
- R6. Leyden, J. & Szczerbinski, M. (2006). Working and Learning Together: An Evaluation of a Collaborative Approach to Intervention. In Clegg, J. & Ginsborg, J. (Eds). *Language and Social Disadvantage: Theory into Practice*. Sussex: Wiley.

Note: R1 R2 R3 R5 are published in rated peer review journals; all are at least 2* quality. R4 and R6 (peer reviewed) are practitioner oriented publications. R3 R4 R5 R6: All authors at Sheffield when research carried out and published. R1 R2: All authors at Sheffield when research carried out. Locke retired and Peers left in 2001-2.

4. Details of the impact

The results of the research described in Section 2 indicate a pressing need to support disadvantaged pupils throughout the school years and beyond. As a result of our follow-up of disadvantaged adults who had attended an ICAN school, more support is given now to 16 year olds moving from school to work; workshops are available for their parents; and specific teaching on the theory driving test is offered [S1] However, the task of supporting language and literacy development in mainstream settings needs to be from nursery through to adulthood and is of such a scale that it cannot be addressed by speech and language therapists alone. It is crucial that school staff are trained to enhance children's language, communication, and literacy skills. In collaboration with the local education authority, Stackhouse, with HCS colleagues Clegg and Trott, has overseen the development and roll-out of training programmes for teachers and support workers in schools and nurseries in the most socially deprived areas of Sheffield. The result has been a step change in the knowledge base of teaching staff in the schools involved, in relation to language and literacy, as feedback such as the following attests: "This is the first course I have attended for a while where I have learnt new information" (Nursery nurse); "It made me think about how children actually 'pick up' and use vocabulary" (Primary teacher).

The development of the training programmes delivered in the census period has built on an initiative dating from 2005, when sponsorship money from a University Tall Ship voyage (£32,000) was secured by Stackhouse for HCS's work on supporting socially disadvantaged children in

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Sheffield in collaboration with the then Education Action Zone (EAZ). In 2005-07 we piloted the development of training materials with staff in 24 mainstream schools. In the school year 2007-08, when the EAZ was replaced by 'The Learning Year' (LY) in Sheffield, our area of work in Language and Communication was the only project retained. In 2008 the LY funded teaching cover for 28 staff in 14 schools so that these staff could take part in our training programme. Promoting children's vocabulary, conversation, listening and attention skills, the programme was delivered through talks, workshops, and supervised practice of structured small group teaching within the schools. In addition, a senior part-time project worker within the school service was funded by the LY to act as a link between HCS and the schools. In 2009, additional materials were requested to help teachers to support children's early literacy development; these became part of the schools' 'Every Child A Writer' initiative. The training was extended to ten more schools and included nursery staff and also staff in a special school, reaching around 1,440 children in 2008-10. [S2]

The impact of the training was felt by all stakeholders:

- a) the *staff* involved, for instance one teacher reported that "*it has given me different strategies to use when teaching vocabulary*";
- b) the *pupils*, as teachers observed an improvement in their listening, attention and vocabulary skills following targeted small group work. One teacher reported that "*it has given a group of children confidence and more abilities to learn in a class environment*";
- c) the *Learning Year* itself: the project was a means of developing the role and responsibilities of the Teaching Assistants and "*something to be proud of – something professional*". The training handbook developed from these training courses was officially launched in November 2008 and is now in all the nurseries and primary schools that took part, also elsewhere by request e.g. Leicester Education Authority. Evidence for its impact is the take-up by city-wide children's services, e.g. *Every Sheffield Child Articulate and Literate (ESCAL)* in Sheffield. These services have incorporated principles and components from the handbook in order to improve the learning potential of their socially disadvantaged children. The national Communication Champion [S3], in her 'Two Years On – Final Report' "*praises the work of community-wide strategies to promote improved communication skills for all children such as Sheffield's 'Every Sheffield Child Articulate and Literate by 11' and the Stoke Speaks Out early years campaign* [based on the original work in Sheffield by Ann Locke] *that has reduced the percentage of 3-4 year olds with delayed language from 64% in 2004 to 39% in 2010*". ESCAL also received a Communication Strategy Award in 2011 as part of the Communication Trust's national 'Shine a Light Awards'.

In 2010 the reach of this work was extended to include children from Roma, Gypsy and Traveller backgrounds, their teachers and their parents. In 2011 an early career knowledge transfer grant (£38k) awarded to Fricke allowed HCS research staff to work in collaboration with the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Services (EMTAS) of Sheffield City Council (now covered by Targeted Intervention Services for Children and Young People) [S4]. Teaching assistants have been trained to develop the vocabulary and language skills of 96 children, attending 12 nurseries or children's centres in Sheffield. These children had performed poorly on language screening measures. As a result, there was a significant improvement in the children's confidence, attention and vocabulary development [S5]. Furthermore, the Teaching Assistants (TA) increased their own knowledge and skills and were more aware of how children learn language and how to improve their own communication skills when working with them: "*A fantastic programme*"; "*I would like to continue working with EAL children and have asked for further training at work*". One parent of an EAL child spontaneously commented: "*I can see a big improvement in his ability naming things, counting and speaking English. So big thanks for supporting my child*". When EMTAS nominated a Teaching Assistant from this project to present at an EAL Champion Event in Sheffield, she concluded by saying '*I'm totally behind this product!*'

The Tall Ship project is maintained in both nurseries and primary schools in Sheffield in

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collaboration with the LY and is integrated into student training placements. In 2012 support was extended to include adolescent pupils at a secondary school in the same disadvantaged area of Sheffield [S6]. This support builds directly on our research (reference 3 above) by developing pupils' understanding of specific curriculum vocabulary in order to enhance access to the curriculum. Our intervention not only improved pupils' comprehension of curriculum words ("*I learned words like discriminate – I didn't have a clue, now I do*"; "*I learned loads – interpret, or sustain, ... I heard of them but never really understood what it meant ...*"), but also had a wider impact: "*I learned not to swear, and not to bully*"; "*I'm more confident speaking to different people*".

The experience of developing a range of school-based programmes has enabled HCS researchers to support practitioners to evaluate their own programmes. Through publication in key practitioner-focused journals, and training days /forums, HCS staff have increased the number of practitioners trained to do this. For example, we organised two national conferences specifically on 'Evaluating Intervention and Service Provision in Schools' (200 participants) and four papers on this topic were published by HCS researchers in a special issue of *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* in 2011. Further, an article on how to evaluate a multidisciplinary training programme (Wright, Stackhouse and Wood) was the most downloaded article published by that journal in 2010-11.

HCS's expertise in this area has led to our researchers working with the charity ICAN to evaluate its own programmes, which are designed to support the development of speech and language skills in all children, including those children with impoverished language. Through competitive tender and then by invitation, HCS staff were chosen to evaluate two of ICAN's national training and support packages. ICAN reports on its website the impact of these programmes with reference to our evaluations. For *Primary Talk*, the work was carried out in primary schools in Bradford. With reference to *Secondary Talk*, ICAN report: "...*Secondary Talk was piloted in 14 secondary schools nationwide, rigorously evaluated by Sheffield University and has been shown to improve both behaviour and engagement in learning.*" [S1]

The work begun at Sheffield by Anne Locke on social disadvantage and language continues to be cited in key documents such as in the *Save the Children Report on Early Language Delays in the UK* (2013), and the *All Party Parliamentary Group Report on the link between speech and language difficulties and social disadvantage* (2013). Thus, HCS staff have had an impact on policy makers and children's charities, as well as on school staff, pupils and families.

Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. A Director of ICAN, a national children's charity, can corroborate our involvement in follow up of adults with communication difficulties, and our evaluation of Primary and Secondary Talk.
- S2. A lead member of the Inclusion and Learning Service, Sheffield Local Authority, can corroborate our longstanding collaboration with Sheffield schools e.g. Ann Locke's work, the Tall Ship and related projects.
- S3. The Government's Communication Champion can corroborate the national perspective on HCS's impact and collaboration with local schools, e.g. input into ESCAL.
- S4. An Early Years Consultant in the Targeted Intervention Services for Children and Young People (previously covered by EMTAS) at Sheffield City Council can corroborate our involvement in supporting language and literacy in schools for children with English as an Additional Language.
- S5. The website <https://sites.google.com/a/sheffield.ac.uk/getready4learning/previous-projects> corroborates support for language and literacy in schools.
- S6. The Special Education Needs Coordinator at a Sheffield secondary school can corroborate the impact of our work on curriculum vocabulary development with adolescents.