

Using Research tools to improve Language in the Early Years (URLEY)

This innovative study is designed to improve children's language, social and emotional outcomes by training nursery and reception teachers to use self-assessment tools called the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) as part of an evidence-based professional development programme. It is funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and led by the University of Oxford, University College London Institute of Education and A+ Education Ltd.



The ERS are highly regarded research tools used for assessing the quality of early years settings and have been shown to predict development in the EYFS, KS1 and beyond, including performance in national tests.

We are looking for 120 primary schools with nursery classes to participate. Up to three nursery and reception teachers per school would take part in a year-long professional development programme. The aim is to evaluate how successful this approach is in improving children's language and social outcomes.

What are the benefits for my school?

This is an opportunity to raise quality in the EYFS, and potentially child outcomes, using tools known to predict children's attainment in KS1, KS2 and beyond. The rating scales also provide a means of tracking improvement over time to provide evidence for Ofsted.

What would be involved for participating teachers?

From each school, we would like at least one nursery and one reception teacher to participate but up to three teachers per school would be welcome. Teachers will receive specialist training in how to support language and social skills in the early years. They will also learn how to use the Environment Rating Scales **ECERS** and **STTEW** to evaluate practice within their classrooms and use evidence-based strategies to develop aspects identified as needing improvement. Teachers will be offered:

- **A five day course spread over two terms.** Teachers would attend one day per month, allowing time between sessions to use the rating scales to evaluate their practice, make changes, and involve other staff within their team. A follow-up day is offered in term three.
- **Individual support from an expert mentor**, who will support each teacher in implementing changes within their class, adapting the approach to suit the school's context and children, and getting other staff (e.g. Teaching Assistants) involved.
- **Access to online resources** to support them in cascading the approach to other staff.

Two study groups

Schools signing up to the study will be randomly allocated to two groups:

- **Group 1** schools will take part in 2016/17. They will receive support worth £1,675 per teacher at a subsidised rate of £200 per teacher (excl. cover costs).
- **Group 2** schools will form the 'comparison' group in 2016/17 for the purposes of the study, and continue their practice as normal. We want to compare progress made by children in Group 1 and 2 schools before Group 2 schools start the programme, to see what impact it has. Once the evaluation is complete, Group 2 schools will receive enough funding for two teachers to access the programme (refined using the study findings) from autumn 2018 onwards, or a payment of £1,000 if they wish to spend the funding on something else.

Schools will be notified whether they are in Group 1 or 2 in December 2016. This will be decided at random and cannot be changed. This is an important aspect of all research funded by the EEF, as it allows for the most robust analysis possible to be conducted.

Programme evaluation

The study is being evaluated by the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR). Researchers from BIT will visit all schools (Group 1 & 2) in Autumn 2016 and carry out a short exercise with children in the nursery class to capture their baseline starting point for language development. The class teacher will also be asked to complete a short survey on social development for children in their class. One class per school will be observed to get a sense of how schools currently approach support in these areas. At the end of the study (Summer 2018), the same class will be observed again and the children (now in reception) will repeat the same exercise with BIT researchers. Staff may also be asked to complete a short questionnaire or interview.

Researchers will not be evaluating your school, teaching staff, or the children in the class. No children, teachers or schools will be named. Their role is to assess how successful the programme is in helping teachers to improve their practice and in improving children's outcomes. We want to compare children's progress in Group 1 schools with children attending Group 2 schools to see whether they make more progress as a result of the study.

Timetable	
Summer term 2016	Recruitment of schools to study (final deadline for paperwork 31 st July 2016)
Autumn term 2016	Launch event Evaluation team visit all schools in Groups 1 and 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One day of observation (one class per school)• Researchers carry out a 25 minute exercise with the children in nursery for whom we have consent (we will ask you to gather consent from parents/guardians)• Nursery class teacher/s complete short survey on children's social development Schools notified whether they are in Group 1 or 2 (early to mid-Dec)
Spring term 2017	Group 1 course begins (3 days this term), alongside individual mentoring support
Summer term 2017	Group 1 course concludes (2 days this term), mentor support as needed
Autumn term 2017	Group 1 follow-up day, mentor support as needed
Summer term 2018	Evaluation team visit all Group 1 and 2 schools to conduct follow-up language exercise with children and class observation. Reception teacher/s complete short survey on children's language development.
Autumn term 2018	Group 2 schools can access the programme or receive £1,000, as preferred.

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