



Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



Language made fun!



Headlines

- ‘*Language made fun*’ is a joint initiative between UCoM (Ulster Centre on Multilingualism) at Ulster and Barnardo’s NI
- It is play-based language intervention program for ESL children
- Intervention sessions are led by Ulster linguistics student volunteers
- Recent completion of pilot study with 3 Arabic-speaking children indicates positive outcomes for both vocabulary and grammar
- Parent reports indicate positive outcomes for language confidence



Why UCoM?

UCoM (Ulster Centre on Multilingualism)

- Established by the linguistics team at Ulster University in June, 2012
- Provides a service for parents, educators and language professionals working/raising children acquiring more than one language
- Delivers services via online channels as well as delivering many hands-on initiatives



Why UCoM?

- **Central aim** to support and promote multilingualism by forging **links with the greater community** to address the subject of multilingualism in Ireland, the UK and the wider European Community
- **A further aim** to foster greater awareness of the **indigenous languages of Northern Ireland** and the **new immigrant languages** by promoting the **benefits of multilingualism**



Why UCoM?

- We are invested in **supporting bilingualism** by nurturing the acquisition of English and encouraging the maintenance of the native language
- We have **knowledge** of the structural properties of a wide range of languages
- We are actively involved in **research on multilingualism**
- Our expertise in linguistic analysis allows us to formulate **specific and targeted language intervention** plans



Why Barnardo's?

- Barnardo's is a **dynamic and innovative** children's charity
- Its aim is to help **children and young people** achieve the best for themselves and their families
- Barnardo's NI has more than **60 different services and programs** working with over 8,000 children, young people and their families across NI
- Barnardo's range of work includes **education support, fostering, early intervention** and **child and family support**
- Barnardo's has begun working directly in schools and is now **working in partnership with over 150 schools**



Why Barnardo's?

Tuar Ceatha

- Barnardo's Tuar Ceatha project provides a range of family support services to BMER families in the greater Belfast area
- It offers support under the themes of *empowerment*, *poverty* and *education*
- It's aim is to meet *holistic family needs* through individual family support, culturally specific parenting programmes and the *promotion of integration*



Why Barnardo's?

Tuar Ceatha

- **In 2013-14 Tuar Ceatha worked with families from over 35 different countries** including over 200 migrant children whose parents had no or very limited English language skills





THE PROJECT



What is it?

- ‘**Language made fun**’ is a play-based language intervention for school-aged EAL children
- It is aimed at supporting the language skills of young EAL learners (‘Newcomer pupils’) who may be vulnerable to **exclusion** and **educational failure**
- At the same time we aim to encourage and support the child’s use of their **native language** hence promoting **the benefits of multilingualism**

What is it?

- A Pilot with three 6-7 year old children (Key Stage 1)
- The findings indicate a positive impact for language and communication skills



How does it work?

The project lasted 12 months and consisted of 5 phases:

Phase 1: Recruitment and Training

Phase 2: Observation and Assessment

Phase 3: Target Selection

Phase 4: Intervention

Phase 5: Evaluation



How does it work?

- 3 Arabic-speaking children were paired with 3 linguistics student volunteers from Ulster
- The weekly intervention sessions lasted 1 hour and ran once per week across 16 weeks (from observation to evaluation)
- The sessions were divided between vocabulary and grammar play-based activities, led by trained linguistics student volunteers under the supervision of the UCoM team at Ulster

Aims

- To develop the **communicative language competence** of migrant children in NI in order to support their **social integration** and **access to education**
- To recognize and reinforce the value and importance of the child's **home language** whilst nurturing their **competence in English**
- To support children's access to education by prioritising the development of core linguistic skills such as **vocabulary** and **grammar** essential for **accessing the curriculum**

Benefits

For the child

- Improved and rich **exposure to English** in a one to one **fun and motivating** context
- Improved English will help children to **access the curriculum** and **improve educational outcomes**
- Improved **confidence in communicating** with peers
- Improved **integration** into school and the wider community

Benefits

For the students

- The opportunity to **apply their academic knowledge** and skills to make a meaningful **impact on society**
- The opportunity to improve their **employability skills**



Benefits

For the school

- Increased support for 'Newcomer pupils'
- Expert advice on recognising transfer from specific foreign languages
- Improved educational outcomes



Why do we need this type of intervention?

- Changing demographics in the UK and Europe have led to an increased number of children from culturally and linguistically diverse populations
- Despite the benefits of multilingualism, we must recognise the challenge of growing up with more than one language
- This is particularly pertinent in the case of '*Sequential Bilinguals*'

Why do we need this type of intervention?

- Research indicates that Newcomer pupils (particularly sequential bilinguals) are **at risk of underachievement** if not sufficiently supported with their second language (eg. Paradis 2008 among many others)
- Children who are not proficient in ‘the language of instruction’ are at risk of experiencing **difficulties accessing the curriculum, lack of inclusion** and possibly **long term educational failure**

Why do we need this type of intervention?

- Our initiative aims to capitalize on the advantages of bilingualism whilst helping to reduce some of the potential challenges faced by EAL children by supporting their acquisition of English whilst nurturing and promoting the use of their native language and their cultural identity



Figures (2011 Census)

NI figures

- English is not the first language for 3.1%(54, 540) of the population
- In 2.13% (14, 976) of homes, no person has English as a first language

Figures: Newcomer pupils

- A Newcomer pupil is a child with English as an additional language and who requires additional support
- According to the DENI'S School Census 2013/14, **10,698 newcomer pupils** are currently in school in Northern Ireland
- One fifth of the total number of newcomer pupils attend school within the **Belfast Education and Library Board (2,139)**

Figures: Newcomer pupils

- Most of these newcomer pupils attend **primary school (1520)** and post primary school (460) with smaller numbers in pre school (53), nursery school (83) or a special school (23)
- The **diversity** of these pupils' backgrounds and needs is much wider than ever before in many schools
- Newcomer pupils may not have the necessary skills in the language of instruction, to **access the curriculum**

Newcomer pupils

- DENI allocates funds to schools each year for each Newcomer pupil recorded on the school census
- In the 2008/2009 financial year, the Department allocated a total of £6,545,000 to support newcomer pupils
- These funds are to help the school *'build upon and maintain the expertise of their teaching staff and provide specific support to those newcomer pupils who have been identified in the census by schools as needing support'* (DENI)



Why do we need this type of intervention?

- Our innovative ‘Language made fun’ initiative aims to provide support for teachers working with Newcomer pupils by providing expert advice on transfer from specific foreign languages and the development of resources tailored to multilingual children
- ‘Language made fun’ represents a cost-effective option for the use of the DENI Newcomer pupil funds to provide the necessary support to teachers whilst improving language outcomes for Newcomer pupils



PILOT STUDY



Phases of development

Phase 1: Recruitment and training (June 2013-October 2014)

Phase 2: Observation and Assessment (November to January 2014)

Phase 3: Target selection (January 2014)

Phase 4: Intervention (February-April 2014)

Phase 5: Evaluation (April-June 2014)

Phase one: Recruitment and training

Children

All 3 of the children were from ethnic minority families who had been accessing Barnardo's Tuar Ceatha services and were recruited based on several criteria:

- Native speakers of Arabic
- Similar amount of exposure to English
- Aged between 6-7 (Key stage 1)

Phase one: Recruitment and training

Students

A place on the project was offered to **first and second year Linguistics Students**. Selection was then based on:

- CV and statement of interest
- Academic scores
- Interview with Barnardos
- Satisfactory Access NI clearance



Phase one: Recruitment and training

Training

4 tier training process:

- Training by Barnardos staff (standard volunteer training)
- Training by a specialist ESL teacher
- Training by an SLT
- Ongoing support from the [linguistics team at Ulster](#) with biweekly group supervision sessions



Phase two: Observation and assessment

Observation and informal assessment

- An extended period of 8 weeks
- Observation and recording of the sessions which were analysed weekly
- Students kept a log of sessions
- Sessions consisted of non-targeted play-based language activities

Phase two: Observation and assessment

Formal assessment

- Children were assessed pre and post intervention using the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-2)
- We used receptive (comprehension) and expressive (production) subtests
- In particular we tested receptive and expressive vocabulary, syntax and morphology

Phase two: Observation and assessment

Formal assessment

- Assessment indicated that all 3 children showed a delay in expressive vocabulary
- 2 of the 3 children were at the lower range of normal for expressive syntax/morphology-**however this tested only a limited number of constructions**
- 1 child showed delay in receptive and expressive syntax and expressive vocabulary

Phase two: Observation and assessment

Teacher interviews

- Interviews were conducted with the class teachers before intervention
- Teachers completed a 'New comer pupil' questionnaire
- Teachers were also asked more general questions regarding the child's communication skills
- From the questionnaires/interviews it proved difficult to obtain specific information on the children's language abilities

Phase three: Target selection

Based on observation and informal/formal assessment we decided to focus on: *Vocabulary and Grammar*

Vocabulary: Tier 1 (basic) and Tier 2 (expansion of basic vocabulary) in order to improve functional communication

Grammar:

- 3 main errors were identified which were exhibited by all 3 children
- Many of these errors were most likely due to **transfer from Arabic**
- Further, they would not be easily detected in a classroom setting as they required careful linguistic analysis

Phase three: Target selection

Grammar

- **Subject-verb agreement** (particularly number)
 - *They is → they are*
- **Auxiliary and copular omission**
 - *The girl run → the girl is running*
- **Pronoun case errors**
 - *Him is tired, the ball is hims → He is tired, the ball is his*

Phase three: Target selection

Targets were identified based on several criteria:

- The **consistency** of the errors
- Language specific errors
- Errors that could be **easily targeted** in play-based activities

Phase four: Intervention

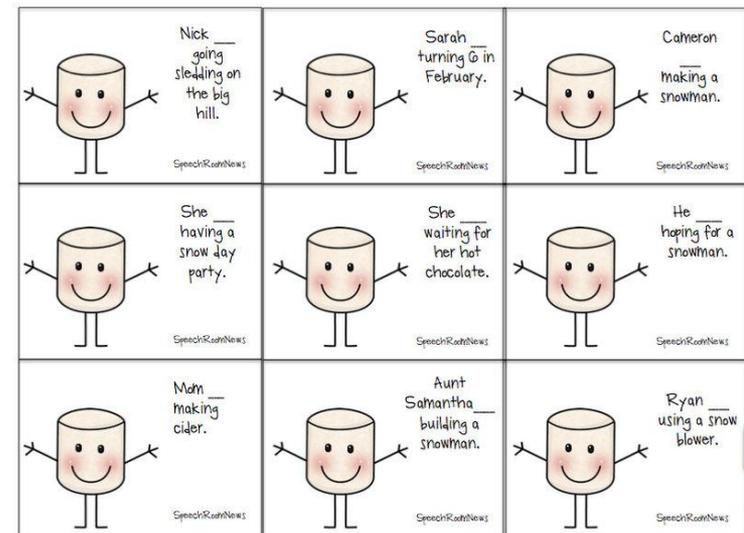
- 6 sessions lasting 1 hour
- Students received training in session planning and completed a targeted session plan for each weekly session
- Students tailored intervention techniques to meet the individual needs of the children
- Students completed a reflective log after each session to record which intervention methods worked best with the child

Phase four: Intervention

- Targeted intervention was **flexible** in terms of the techniques depending on the individual child
- The activities were designed to be **fun and motivating** for the children
- Students used a range of **intervention and elicitation techniques** learned during training, for example:
 - Modeling and imitation
 - Barrier games
 - Role play
 - Story recall

Phase four: Intervention

- Students used a combination of toys/games and paper-based specific ESL resources



Phase five: Evaluation

Observation and informal assessment

- Post intervention language samples indicated that the children were using **longer and more complex sentences**
- We also noticed clear improvements in the children's **confidence in communicating** in English

Phase five: Evaluation

Observation and informal assessment

- Analysis of pre and post intervention sessions indicated a reduction in the frequency of each of the error types we worked on:
 - Subject -Verb agreement
 - Pronoun case errors
 - Auxiliary/copula use/omission
- There was also a reduction in errors in other areas such as tense marking and question formation

Phase five: Evaluation

Pre intervention

'The eyes is closed'

'He have long hair'

'The girl have the red coat'

'Your eyes is big'

Post intervention

'The flowers are red'

'The boys are happy'

'She has long hair'

'We have to bring materials'

Phase five: Evaluation

Pre intervention

'I show you that'

'I in there'

'Is that one is that are'

'You know her?'

'Why not working?'

Post intervention

'He is playing'

'I am reading'

'I was waiting to change my book because I finished it in three days'

'It is dark, it is a little dark but you can't see'

Phase five: Evaluation

Formal assessment

- Post intervention assessment with the CELF showed minor improvements for 2 out of 3 children from **expressive vocabulary** and **syntax**
- However, this assessment was not sensitive enough to detect all of the grammatical errors pre intervention

Phase five: Evaluation

Teacher interviews

- Are being carried out by Barnardo's staff as part of a bigger project on how schools spend money allocated for Newcomer pupils

Phase five: Evaluation (March-June 2014)

Quotes from parents

“She really enjoys it. She is always looking forward to it”

“She learned without realizing.”

“Her English has improved, she has learnt new words.”

“She really likes it and really likes Beth.”



The student experience

'The project was well organised with a clear structure throughout and set days and times. There was a huge amount of support for the students and collaboration with supervisors. Linguistic elements from the previous session were discussed at length each week and a structure to help the children was established. Tools were provided from the linguistics team to evaluate, improve and then re-assess the children's language abilities. Practical and logistical issues were discussed with the Barnardo's supervisors who provided tools to facilitate the play based learning'



The student experience

“Observing the children develop their language skills was very rewarding and, along with the skills and teaching experience, made the project hugely beneficial for all parties involved”

“The experience for me was fantastic”



Learning from the pilot

- Standardised language assessments are crucial but they should not be used as the only **measurement of change** in bilingual children
- Detailed **linguistic analysis** of recordings of the children speaking English during play-based activities provided a more detailed profile of the children's linguistic strengths and weaknesses
- Furthermore, the identification of grammatical transfer requires linguistic expertise and may therefore **not be explicitly observable to a class teacher**

Future plans

- To provide a cost-effective option for the use of DENI funds allocated to schools for **Newcomer pupils**
- To **expand the project** to involve a larger number of children
- To use the data to compile linguistic information on **the top 5 Newcomer languages in NI**
- To identify **common areas of transfer** in these top 5 languages
- To **develop resources for teachers and other professionals** to specifically target these common areas of transfer



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Thank you

Dr Raffaella Folli

r.folli@ulster.ac.uk

www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/ucocom/