

Language intervention provides educational benefits for preschool children

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A pre-school language intervention programme can significantly improve the educational lives of children with poorly developed speech and language skills, according to new research by psychologists at the University of York.

In the Language 4 Reading project, a team from the University's Department of Psychology at the University of York have evaluated the benefits of a pre-school language intervention programme for children who enter school with poorly developed speech and language skills.

The project, which involved 15 schools and feeder-nurseries across Yorkshire, was a [randomised controlled trial](#) funded by the Nuffield Foundation. A member of staff from each of the Early Years settings was trained to deliver a language intervention programme.

The programme targeted three key areas: vocabulary knowledge, narrative and listening skills, with phonics work included in the later stages. Children took part in three group sessions each week, supplemented by individual work once they entered school.

After 30 weeks, the children who had received the intervention showed wide-ranging improvements in expressive language skills, including the use of vocabulary and grammar, while gains in letter-sound knowledge and spelling indicate that the foundations of phonics are in place.

Professor Margaret Snowling, who led the research team, said:

"[Language skills](#) are the foundation for literacy development and are fundamental to educational success. Our findings show that language intervention can be delivered successfully in Early Years settings by appropriately trained and supported teaching assistants. It has the potential to improve the educational lives of many children.

"Feedback from [children](#), parents and teaching assistants indicates that taking part in the project has been an enjoyable experience for all concerned. The commitment of the schools and the enthusiasm of the teaching assistants have contributed to the success of the project."

Provided by University of York

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