



Learning Language and Loving It™ is Making a Difference in Australia

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On January 24, 2019, we had the pleasure of hosting a member chat with Dr. Patricia Eadie, the lead researcher involved with the *Every Toddler Talking* initiative. This project was initiated in 2015 by the Victorian Department of Education and Training in Australia in order to:

- Strengthen the practice of early childhood educators (ECEs) so that they could promote young children's language and communication development (birth to three)
- Promote collaboration between ECEs and speech language pathologists
- Improve language and communication outcomes for young children

(Eadie, 2019; Eadie, Tayler, & Stark, 2018)

Dr. Eadie and her colleagues reviewed many evidence-based programs which promote children's language and communication skills in early childhood settings, and chose Learning Language and Loving It™ (LLLI) as the intervention for this initiative. LLLI had the strongest evidence to support its effectiveness, as well as features which aligned with collaborative practice, one of the main goals of this project (Eadie et al., 2018). In order to promote collaboration, LLLI was delivered by pairs of professionals — a community speech language pathologist and an early childhood educational leader. The majority of these professionals were quite experienced in their fields (Eadie, 2019). Janice Greenberg, Program Director for LLLI, went to Australia in February 2016 and trained these paired professionals to deliver the LLLI Program.

Study Design

Nineteen daycare centres across seven areas in Victoria participated in the intervention, and a matched set of nineteen centres served as control sites. Centres in lower socioeconomic areas with a higher prevalence of children with developmental vulnerabilities were targeted (Eadie et al., 2018). Each pair of professionals delivered LLLI to approximately 11 ECEs from three centres in their local area.

The educators' classroom practices and the outcomes of the children in their care were measured at three time points:

- Time 1 - at the beginning of the LLLI program (both intervention and control centres were measured)
- Time 2 - at the completion of LLLI (both intervention and control centres were measured)

- Time 3 - approximately six months after completion of *LLLI* (only intervention centres measured at Time 3, not control centres)

Information was collected using the following:

- **Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®)** (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008) – the educators' practice was evaluated using the CLASS®, an observational tool that gathers information about several elements of educators' classroom practices. Two versions of the CLASS were used in this project due to the age range of children in the study:
 - the Toddler version captures information about how educators provide “Emotional and Behavioural Support” (e.g. sensitivity, classroom climate, behaviour guidance, regard for children's perspectives) and “Engaged Support for Learning” (how educators provide language modeling, feedback, and opportunities for learning and development)
 - the Pre-K version evaluates three dimensions, “Emotional Support” (classroom climate, sensitivity, and regard for children's perspectives), “Classroom Organization” (this includes behaviour management, productivity, and instructional learning formats), and “Instructional Support” (language modeling, feedback, and concept development)

At Time 1 (baseline), both the intervention and control centres were very similar in CLASS® domain scores (Eadie et al., 2018).

- **MacArthur-Bates Communication Development Inventory (MCDI)** (Fenson, Marchman, Thal, Dale, Reznick, & Bates, 2006) – parents of children in both the intervention and control centres completed the MCDI. Eadie et al. obtained completed MCDI data for 125 children in the intervention group at Time 1, 72 children at Time 2, and 38 children at Time 3. The researchers received completed MCDI data for 97 children in the control group at Time 1, and 51 control children at Time 2. Parents in the control group didn't complete the MCDI at Time 3.
- **Focus groups and interviews** – educators in the intervention group participated in interviews and focus groups to provide information about changes in their knowledge and practice after completing *LLLI*
- **Parent surveys** – parents of children in the intervention group completed surveys at the end of the intervention to provide their reflections on the program and the partnership that developed between their child's ECEs and the speech language pathologist

Results

Early Childhood Educator Outcomes

The outcomes showed that LLLI had a positive impact

- **Early childhood educators who received *LLLI* improved their CLASS® scores between Time 1 and Time 2** – while educators in the control group did not improve their scores during this period
- **When Time 1 and 2 scores from the intervention group were compared to the control group, significant differences were observed** – CLASS® scores were significantly different between toddler intervention rooms and toddler classrooms in the control group. Differences between infant intervention and control classrooms were non-significant but with large effect sizes. This means that the difference between the groups was large, but that the sample sizes were likely too small for the results to reach significance (there were more toddler rooms in the study, and fewer observations made in

infant rooms). Eadie et al. (2018) explain that the large effect sizes indicate that changes noted in the intervention ECEs' practice were pedagogically meaningful, and ECEs were using strategies to improve instructional support.

- **Significant improvements were observed in intervention educators' performance between Time 1 and Time 3** – six months after the completion of *LLLI*, educators in infant rooms showed significant gains in the Engaged Support for Learning and Emotional and Behavioural Support domains on the CLASS®. Educators in toddler rooms made significant improvements in the Emotional Support and Instructional Support domains.
- **The number of *LLLI*-trained educators in a classroom was significantly associated with CLASS® scores at Time 2** – when there was more than one trained ECE in a classroom, they encouraged and supported each other to implement the *LLLI* strategies (Eadie et al., 2018)

Child Outcomes

The study outcomes showed evidence of improved communication

- **Small but non-significant shifts in vocabulary for children in the intervention group** – children in the intervention group gained on average more than 1 vocabulary percentile score between Time 1 and 2 on the MCDI, while children in the control group had percentile scores that were, on average, 4 percentile points lower during the same period. While these results were non-significant, Dr. Eadie (2019) explained that changes in vocabulary represent a long-term goal for children. By measuring vocabulary at the end of a short-term intervention (*LLLI*), the long-term benefits of improved classroom quality on vocabulary may not be evident. Furthermore, parent-reported vocabulary may not be a sensitive enough tool to detect changes in children's communication over this time period. Eadie et al. (2019) explain that the young children in the study were all within a window of rapid vocabulary development, which makes the detection of group differences difficult (Eadie, Stark, & Niklas, 2019).
- **Children for whom English was a second language demonstrated a relative advantage in vocabulary growth** – in the intervention group, these children gained an average of 7 percentile points in vocabulary size between Time 1 and Time 2.

Key Findings from Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups

- **Co-facilitation was highly valued** – the pair of professionals (ECE leader and SLP) contributed different but complementary skills and knowledge (Eadie et al., 2018).
- **Video coaching had a powerful impact on educators' learning and practice**
- **ECEs increased their knowledge about children's communication and language development**

- **Relationships were strengthened** – what emerged was a “three-way trusting relationship between [ECEs], families and the speech pathologist” (Eadie et al., 2018, p. 45). This relationship positively impacted the referral process and family support.
- **ECEs felt better able to support all of the children in their care, including those who were less capable communicators**
- **Intra-professional relationships were strengthened** – participating in this project enabled early childhood education and care (ECEC) services to collaborate with other ECECs in their local areas.
- **Growth in educators’ self-perception and confidence** – their identity as being part of a wider profession grew, as did educators’ enthusiasm for further professional growth. For many ECEs, this project provided their first opportunity for professional development (Eadie, 2019).
- **“Threshold conditions” were identified that were related to the successful implementation of LLLI** – these included the stability of leadership and staffing in early childhood services, the ability of services to commit staff time and resources to the program, and an organizational culture that enables professional development.

Conclusion

According to the researchers, *Every Toddler Talking*

“represents one of a few studies which have confirmed the successful impact of professional learning on [early childhood] educator practice in a sustained way, specifically, in the instructional support for language learning in very young children” (Eadie et al., 2018, p. 4).

They identify several key components of professional learning, all of which are integral to the LLLI program:

- Content knowledge
- Practice strategies that support and strengthen interactions between the ECEs and children
- High quality coaching
- Video feedback to support implementation of strategies

These components, along with some of the survey findings above, align with previously identified requirements for effective in-service education, including (as summarized by Weitzman, Girolametto & Greenberg, 2006):

- A continuous program of study, offered over a sustained period of time
- Active participation of learners in the learning process
- Opportunities to apply and practice knowledge in simulated and real-life situations
- Expert mentoring or coaching in real-life situations
- Immediate feedback on learners’ application of newly-learned behaviour
- The collective participation of all educators from the same setting

It’s the combination of these elements that makes *Learning Language and Loving It* a successful professional development program that makes a difference to the practices of early childhood educators. In fact, this type of learning opportunity may even have a greater impact on classroom quality than the educators’ formal education. Eadie et al. (2018) didn’t find associations between the educators’ qualifications and their classroom practices. Neither did Diane Early and her colleagues in their analysis of data from seven major studies of preschool programs (Early, Maxwell, Burchinal, Alva, Bender, Bryant, Cai, Clifford, Ebanks, Griffin, Henry, Howes, Iriondo-Perez, Jeon, Mashburn, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, Vandergrift, & Zill, 2007). Early et al. (2007) concluded that focusing on educators’ formal education to improve classroom quality would not be effective, and instead,

“...raising the effectiveness of early childhood education likely will require a broad range of professional development activities and supports targeted toward teachers’ interactions with children” (p. 558).

The Hanen Centre is gratified that *Learning Language and Loving It* could play an important role in the *Every Toddler Talking* initiative, and that the program had such a positive impact on the professionals involved.

For more information, you can access the full report at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/publications.aspx>, or you can watch the recording of our recent Online Member Meeting with Dr. Eadie in the Online Member Meetings archive.

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About The Hanen Centre

Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.

For more information, please visit www.hanen.org.

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