Manor Park Talks

Pilot Report

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The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent grant-making charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement, ensuring that children from all backgrounds can fulfil their potential and make the most of their talents.

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- identifying promising educational innovations that address the needs of disadvantaged children in primary and secondary schools in England;
- evaluating these innovations to extend and secure the evidence on what works and can be made to work at scale; and
- encouraging schools, government, charities, and others to apply evidence and adopt innovations found to be effective.

The EEF was established in 2011 by the Sutton Trust as lead charity in partnership with Impetus Trust (now part of Impetus - Private Equity Foundation) and received a founding £125m grant from the Department for Education. Together, the EEF and Sutton Trust are the government-designated What Works Centre for improving education outcomes for school-aged children.

This pilot was co-funded with KPMG Foundation.

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Executive summary

The project

Manor Park Talks (MPT) is a professional development programme developed and delivered by Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre in the London Borough of Newham. The programme focuses on training aimed at improving the skills and expertise of the early years workforce in supporting children's early language development. Trained staff are expected to apply their learning to the key target group—disadvantaged children in receipt of Free Early Education Entitlement at age two (FEEE2).

The MPT pilot programme consisted of training for managers and practitioners to support the implementation of a whole-setting approach to promoting children's early language development and communication. The full set of training and support activities is listed in Table **1** (page 9). The independent training consultants delivered training in two stages: a full-day launch event for all nursery managers and a full-day 'bespoke' training session at each participating nursery involving all staff.

During the training, early years staff were taught to listen to children and develop conversations with them using five strategies:[1]

- conversational responsiveness;
- interactive book-reading;
- using songs, rhymes, and stories to support expressive language;
- print referencing to support emergent literacy; and
- listening to sounds.

The aim of the pilot was to understand the feasibility and acceptability of the programme and to develop and refine the logic model of the intervention. A formative evaluation was conducted using qualitative methods: observations of training and coaching sessions and in-depth interviews with managers and staff at participating nurseries. Interviews with the trainers and coach were also conducted. Due to the small number of nurseries taking part and the focus of the formative evaluation on reviewing and refining the intervention, the findings and implications are not generalisable.

This pilot trial was co-funded by the Department for Education as part of the EEF's Early Years Professional Development Funding round. It was co-funded with the KPMG Foundation.

Key findings

Research question	Finding
Is there evidence to support the theory of change?	Practitioners reported being more reflective of their own practice than before being part of the programme, finding opportunities for one-to-one interactions with children based on MPT techniques, with reported improvements in children's language and communication. There is some evidence to suggest that staff were engaging more in conversations with children and felt more confident in doing so. Staff reported that shy children seemed to engage more in conversation as a result of staff using conversational responsiveness techniques. As implementation was often phased, with nurseries choosing to focus on one to two specific techniques at any one point in time, an overall assessment of success cannot be made.

[1] For more details about these strategies refer to the poster in Appendix A.

Is the approach feasible to deliver?	The pilot of the Manor Park Talks programme demonstrated to managers that there was a knowledge gap and an interest in learning new ways of improving children's early language and communication. The interviews suggest that settings continued to deliver MPT techniques in a flexible way throughout the school year with some indication that they were becoming embedded in daily practice. This formative evaluation helped the developers to refine the intervention so that it would be more appealing to early years practitioners. The revised version of MPT focuses on conversational responsiveness and was therefore easier to apply than the full set of strategies outlined in the initial design. MPT is replicable in its current form although further clarity is needed on the role of mentors.
Is the intervention ready for scaling up across Newham?	Based on staff reports, we know that nurseries were continuing to apply the MPT techniques that they had learned, albeit in a range of ways. The revised intervention focusing only on conversational responsiveness can be implemented across all settings in Newham.

Additional findings

Although staff valued the training sessions and demonstrated an eagerness to apply the training in practice, the full set of strategies that practitioners were first introduced to was perceived by managers to be daunting. The formative nature of the evaluation meant that these emerging findings were shared with the developers. Two main issues were discussed: (a) that practitioners had not fully understood the key principles around 'interactive book-reading', which was to use story books as tools to engage children in conversation, and (b) that the number of strategies and specific techniques forming MPT was causing confusion.

As a consequence, a decision was made that MPT was primarily an intervention about conversational responsiveness and the specific techniques to improve this. Interactive book-reading was included in this as a component of conversational responsiveness. This revised model was communicated to nurseries in early 2019.

Based on this change, the developers started a process to modify the poster issued to nurseries describing MPT strategies and techniques.[2] The revised intervention focuses on conversational responsiveness with interactive book-reading as the main activity. The revisions emphasise techniques that practitioners can apply and sets out activities for parents to support early language and communication development at home.

Practitioners reported that the revised version of MPT focusing on specific conversational responsiveness techniques was easier to apply than the full set of strategies set out in the initial design.

[2] The poster for the revised MPT approach is in Appendix D.

Introduction

Background evidence

Early literacy development is a crucial building block for children's development. Children naturally develop language skills at different rates, but some children fall behind at an early age. Depending on the measures used, 7% to 15% of preschool children are defined as experiencing language difficulties and 14% to 18% do not reach the expected level in the Communication, Language and Literacy domain of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile (Law et al., 2017). Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, much more likely to experience delays and difficulties.

A key determinant of language development is the amount and quality of language to which a young child is exposed. Given that over 95% of three- to four-year-olds participate in formal early education (Albakri et al., 2018), early years practitioners play an important role. Although the vast majority (94%) of early years (EY) settings were assessed by Ofsted as being good or outstanding (Ofsted, 2018), the early years workforce is comprised predominantly of staff with Level 3 qualifications (below degree level; DfE, 2018) and recent research points to a downward trend in qualifications (Bonetti, 2018). It is likely, therefore, that the workforce would benefit from continuous professional development (CPD) targeted at language.

Every Child a Talker (ECaT),[3] on which Manor Park Talks is based, was a universal programme designed to improve the skills of the early years workforce in supporting speech, language, and communication development. Its ultimate aim was to raise children's achievement in early language as measured against the EYFS Profile. It was initially launched as a national project by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now DfE) with funding assigned to local authorities with relatively poor results against the language goals in the Foundation Stage Profile (currently the EYFS Profile).

A similar programme, Early Talk (ET), designed by the organisation I Can, aimed to improve the knowledge and skills of early years practitioners in order to improve speech, language, and communication (SLC) outcomes for children up to five years old. ET was rolled out in 2007 across 200 Children's Centres. An implementation study found that ET played a valuable role in integrating personal understanding of SLC and helped to embed good practice at setting level (Witmarsh et al., 2010) . However, in some cases practitioners found it difficult to distinguish between ET and ECaT.

MPT uses the key principles and strategies of ECaT and Sheringham Nursery School have developed it to address specific local needs in Newham—a large population of children for whom English is an additional language and a precarious early years sector with high staff turnover and settings struggling to afford increases in rent.

MPT was in an early stage of development and was considered ready for piloting. The rationale for the evaluation was to assess implementation in a small number of pilot settings to determine how the intervention could be further developed and refined before rolling it out across all nurseries in Newham. To achieve this, a formative evaluation with regular feedback to developers was deemed the most appropriate approach.

The intervention

Manor Parks Talks is a professional development programme developed and delivered by Sheringham Nursery School, Newham. Independent training consultants designed and delivered the training and an early years practitioner was appointed as a coach to facilitate the coaching sessions. Mentoring support was provided by staff at Sheringham Nursery School

MPT is a new professional development programme focused on improving the skills and expertise of the early years workforce in supporting early language development. Trained staff are expected to apply their learning to the key target

[3] https://www.egfl.org.uk/sites/default/files/School_effectiveness/Teaching_and_learning/SEND/ecat_launch.pdf

group—disadvantaged children in receipt of Free Early Education Entitlement at age two (FEEE2). The intervention focuses on listening to children and developing conversations with them using the following strategies:[4]

- conversational responsiveness—increasing the amount a child says and the complexity of their conversation;
- interactive book-reading—making individual comments about a book and making links between the book and children's own ideas and experiences;
- using songs, rhymes, and stories to support expressive language—children singing or talking to themselves using rhymes and words to form songs and singing and acting out rhymes and stories using propositions;
- print referencing to support emergent literacy—children talking about their interpretation of a picture or poster and talking about the features of print (such as recognising letters or brands); and
- listening to sounds—children displaying sound awareness and association of sounds with familiar objects.

In relation to these strategies, the following specific techniques for practitioners to apply with children on an individual basis were set out in the training presentation:

- observing and commenting—observe what a child is doing and then comment on the child's activity rather than asking a question;
- OWL—'observe, wait, listen'—rather than talking; an adult should observe what a child is doing, wait for them to talk, and listen to what the child says;
- 'wait, watch, wonder'—use a child's spontaneous activity or free play to start a conversation;
- questions and comments—an adult knowing when to ask questions and when to comment to extend the conversation or add language complexity in a conversation with a child; and
- the four finger rule (initially referred to as the five finger rule)—every question should be followed by three comments to extend conversations with a child.

A technique not covered in the training slides but mentioned by trainers and developers was 'serve and return' as a way to increase the time spent in conversation with children. Also mentioned by developers, trainers, and practitioners was the ten-second rule based on which practitioners wait up to ten seconds for a child to respond.

MPT was designed to place more emphasis on changing pedagogy and less on the recording and tracking of assessment data and completion of audits. Additional emphasis was placed on leadership, particularly in relation to supporting changes in practice and embedding practice.

During the pilot, MPT consisted of training for managers and practitioners to support the implementation of a whole-setting approach to promoting children's early language development and communication. The training consultants delivered the training in two stages.

A launch event involved all nursery managers and included managers from some school-based providers. The full-day session consisted of presentations about children's language and communication development, the use of videos to demonstrate key skills, and small group discussions. The presentations covered key aspects of early communication, quality factors, and short video clips of children interacting with adults. Following the launch event, a full-day 'bespoke' training session was delivered at each setting. The same topics as the launch event were covered, however the in-setting training included small group or paired exercises for staff to practice techniques to use with children. In addition, there was a discussion focused on supporting children with English as an additional language and a walking tour of the nursery. Practitioners were also taught how to observe practice, reflect on their own practice, and give each other feedback. Nurseries were provided with a poster of the MPT strategies to display at their setting (see Appendix A). The purpose of this was a reminder of what practitioners were required to do. The materials given to settings were:

- a checklist (audit tool) at the launch event (there was no requirement to use it); and
- a poster to display at the setting.

Another aspect of MPT was the development of a network of practitioners focused on quality of practice for early language development. It is for this reason that managers from school-based providers were invited to the launch event and coaching sessions and mentoring support was available to participating nursery managers. The attendance of experienced managers from school-based providers was expected to be the source of knowledge and expertise for

[4] For more details about these strategies refer to the poster in Appendix A.

setting managers to draw upon. The coaching sessions focused on planning the delivery of MPT and on addressing issues experienced by practitioners when implementing the intervention. Mentors visited each setting at least termly, and more often when needed. The mentors' role was to support managers practically with implementation and to help managers with accurate self-evaluation. Table 1 below summarises the intervention.

Table 1: Summary of intervention activities and participation

Intervention activity	Who delivered activity	Frequency of activity	Who took part
Launch event	Independent consultants	Once, at the start of intervention	Nursery managers and staff from local schools/nurseries
Bespoke training	Independent consultants	Once, after the launch event	All staff in nursery setting
Coaching sessions	Coach	Monthly	Nursery managers and staff from local school-based nurseries
Mentoring	Mentors (staff from Sheringham Nursery School)	Termly	Nursery manager

MPT was delivered in the context of two key challenges for the early years sector: an infrastructure insecurity and high staff turnover. The precarious nature of the sector was observed during the evaluation when one nursery closed down during the course of the study and the developers were able to successfully intervene to stop another nursery closing.

Research questions

The overall objectives of the evaluation were to understand the feasibility and acceptability of Manor Park Talks. The evaluation did not intend to assess the intervention's readiness for trial but instead considered 'readiness for scaling-up across Newham', as agreed with the developer and the EEF at project set-up. The formative approach focused on:

- identifying reported changes in practice;
- reviewing materials and CPD provision;
- exploring perceived barriers and facilitators to success, including 'joined-up working';
- identifying the necessary components (which components can be dropped and which are necessary for improving language and communication) of MPT through a triangulation of all data collected; and
- assessing perceived scalability.

The key research questions the study addressed are discussed below with their corresponding detailed research questions included in brackets:

- Is there evidence to support the theory of change (RQs 1–4)?
- Is the approach feasible to deliver (RQs 5–13)?
- Is the intervention ready to be scaled-up across Newham (RQs14–20)?

The detailed research questions that the evaluation was designed to address are set out in Appendix B.

Ethical review

Ethical approval was obtained from NatCen's Research Ethics Committee. The anonymity of participants has been protected and no nursery, staff members, or children are identified in any outputs or reports.

Whilst we have done our utmost to ensure anonymity, it may be that settings or staff are identifiable because the pilot was conducted in only eight nurseries, which were clustered in a small geographical area. Moreover, during the course of the evaluation, research staff observed 'coaching sessions' with other nurseries as the intent of the programme was to build a network around MPT. This is an added risk to anonymity which was verbally communicated to nurseries and staff at the start of the project.

Data protection and GDPR

All data was transferred securely and stored in a secure folder. The data was available only to the research team for the purpose of this evaluation. Nurseries or individual staff who no longer wished to take part in the evaluation could request to have their data deleted at any point prior to the submission of the draft report.

NatCen was the data controller and the data processor for the evaluation. The lawful basis for processing data was 'legitimate interest'. We issued a privacy notice to all concerned parties and published it on the study's webpage (http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/1659732/Manor-Park-Talks-Privacy-notice-040918.pdf). All data will be deleted six months after the conclusion of the study.

A data sharing agreement was set up between NatCen and Sheringham Nursery School. Data was shared using NatCen's secure data sharing system.

The developers issued their own privacy notice for collecting data.

Project team

MPT was developed by staff at Sheringham Nursery School which is based in Manor Park, Newham:

UCL IOE

Professor Lynn Ang and Dr Sinead Harmey.

Sheringham

Lead: Julian Grenier.
Project Manager: Tracey Warden.
Mentors: Lindsey Foster and Fliss James.

Independent consultants

Trainers: Helen Moylett and Nancy Stewart.
Coach: Jane Wotherspoon.

The evaluation was carried out by NatCen's Children and Families team. It was led by Fatima Husain. The day to day project manager was Sarah Morris, the research director. Sarah was supported by researchers Tanya Basi and Tom Bristow.

Recruitment

The developer, Sheringham Nursery School, recruited private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) nurseries in the Manor Park neighbourhood of Newham, London to take part in the pilot. The developer initially recruited twelve PVI settings and six schools with maintained nurseries to participate. The evaluation focused on an assessment of MPT delivery in PVIs only as the intent of MPT was to support the PVI sector. The role of participating maintained nurseries was limited to attending coaching sessions, sharing best practice, and supporting the development of a knowledge sharing network across Manor Park and eventually Newham.

Of the twelve settings initially recruited to the pilot, four dropped out at an early stage: one before the launch event and three others soon after. Eight PVIs delivered MPT and took part in the evaluation. One nursery dropped out part-way through because the setting closed down. The staff at this nursery still took part in some aspects of the evaluation.

The number of staff in nurseries ranged from 5 to 23. This wide variation was a reflection of the number of childcare places available at the setting as well the age at which children were accepted in the nursery (from the age of three months in some cases).

All participating settings signed a Memorandum of Understanding that included the requirements for participating in the evaluation. A research information sheet and privacy notice were issued to all settings. Setting managers and staff took part in the research.

Methods

The evaluation was conducted during the 2018/2019 school year. Due to the small number of settings and the formative nature of the study, qualitative methods were used. To gather breadth and depth of insight, research was conducted across all eight PVI settings and further in-depth research involving multiple data collection points in five selected settings. The evaluation focused on the delivery in Manor Park only. This included the coaching sessions, the primary focus of which were to support managers to plan and deliver MPT. A secondary aim of the coaching sessions was to create a knowledge exchange network of early years experts. This aspect of the coaching sessions was not included in the evaluation because the development of a network—where experts are linked in over time—would have required a longer study and additional data collection with network members.

Measuring the impacts of MPT was outside the scope of the formative design of this evaluation because the intervention was in a developmental stage.

All data collection for the purposes of this evaluation was carried out by the NatCen research team. An important aspect of the formative approach was to provide emerging findings on a termly basis to the developer. In Appendix B is a table that maps the research aims within the three key evaluation domains—evidence of promise, feasibility, and readiness for scaling-up across Newham. The methods and timing of data collection are detailed below.

Developing a logic model

Before the start of data collection, a logic model specifying the core elements of MPT was developed (presented in Appendix C). An important component of the formative nature of the study was workshops facilitated by NatCen at the end of each term. The developer, the training consultants, and members of the NatCen research team attended each workshop (three in total). Emerging findings from the evaluation were presented and discussed at each workshop and the developers also reflected on intervention design. Only one major revision was made to intervention. The concluding section reflects on the logic model development process and changes made to the intervention.

Data collection

The evaluation used qualitative methods—in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted individually and observations to assess delivery of the MPT pilot. All face-to-face interviews took place at nursery settings. This section details how and when data was collected, analysed, and reported. Table 2 provides a summary of the methods. At the end of the section a timetable is provided.

- *Observation of the launch event*: data was collected on how the intervention was introduced to nursery managers by Sheringham Nursery and the interaction between the training consultants and attendees.
- *Observation of bespoke training sessions*: NatCen researchers observed in-setting training, which was delivered at all participating nurseries. The observations recorded coverage and content of training and responsiveness of attendees.
- *Nursery manager interviews*: soon after the bespoke training, nursery managers were interviewed to gather perceptions of the training and discuss how MPT would be applied across the nursery setting by all staff.
- *Interviews with trainers*: once all the bespoke training sessions were delivered, a paired interview with the two trainers was conducted to gather their views on delivering the training, the perceived responsiveness of attendees, and any reported insights into the barriers and facilitators to delivery.

Coaching session observations

- Five of the seven coaching sessions were observed in order to better understand planning of delivery and discuss any issues raised by managers. In addition, one telephone interview was conducted with the coaching session lead to gather their views on how well managers were prepared and the challenges they were facing.

In-depth setting-based research

To gain more insight into how nursery staff were applying their learning and to find out which strategies are being delivered (and how), five nurseries were purposively selected for in-depth research. These were selected based on their most recent OFSTED rating ('outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement', or 'inadequate') and those awaiting an inspection. There were no nurseries rated 'inadequate'. The other sampling consideration was the developer's perception of a nursery's openness to engaging with MPT. At each of these five settings the following data collection was carried out:

- *Spring term*: a visit to the nursery comprised interviews with the manager and two members of staff. These interviews included a discussion on how the setting was progressing in relation to delivering MPT strategies. Staff views on the coaching sessions and ongoing provision of support were also gathered.
- *Summer term*: similar to the spring term nursery visits, in the five settings, the manager and two members of staff were interviewed, Moreover, an interview with the nursery managers in the remaining nurseries was conducted.

Initially all interviews focused on the delivery of the five MPT strategies: what was perceived to work best and what needs to change. Following the revision of the intervention, the focus of the interviews was on what they were delivering (mainly conversational responsiveness techniques) and the advice they would give to nurseries preparing to deliver MPT.

Table 2: Summary of research questions and methods[5]

IPE Category	Research Questions	Research method	Participants	Analysis
Evidence of Promise	RQ1	Logic model meeting and workshops	Developers and trainers	Activity and outcome mapping
	RQ2	In-depth interviews	Nursery managers, staff and trainers	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ3	In-depth interviews	Nursery managers and staff	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ4	In-depth interviews and observations	Nursery managers and coaching session attendees	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
Feasibility	RQ5	In-depth interviews	Nursery managers and staff	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ6	In-depth interviews, document analysis	Nursery managers and coaching session attendance records	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ7	In-depth interviews and observations	Nursery managers and staff	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ8	In-depth interviews and observations	Nursery managers and staff	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ9	In-depth interviews and observations	Coaching session and coach	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ10	In-depth interviews	Nursery managers and staff	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ11	In-depth interviews	Nursery managers, staff and trainers	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ12	In-depth interviews	Nursery managers and staff	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ13	In-depth interviews	Nursery managers and staff	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
Readiness for scaling-up across Newham	RQ14	In-depth interviews and workshops	Nursery managers, staff and developers	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ15	In-depth interviews and workshops	Nursery staff and developers	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ16	In-depth interviews	Nursery staff and developers	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ17	Workshop discussions	Developers	Outcome and measure identification
	RQ18	In-depth interviews and workshops	Nursery managers, staff, trainers and workshops	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis
	RQ19	Cost data collection	Nursery managers (via developers)	Cost analysis
	RQ20	In-depth interviews and workshops	Nursery managers, staff, trainers and developers	Framework deductive/inductive charting thematic analysis

[5] The full set of research questions are in Appendix B and the achieved sample sizes are in Table 4 below

Data summaries

We planned to collect three data summaries from the developer:

1. **ITERS-3 environment rating scale data.** The data collection of the nursery environment was carried out by an external assessor appointed by the developer. The intent was to collect pre- and post-intervention data. During the course of the evaluation, ITERS-3 data was only collected at one point in time—December 2018—with post-intervention data collection scheduled for autumn term 2019 (after the conclusion of the evaluation). For this reason, data summaries have not been included.
2. **Costs incurred by nurseries in delivering MPT.** This data was collected by the developer using a template distributed to PVIs for managers to record costs incurred.
3. **Register of manager attendance at the seven coaching sessions.** Attendance data was collected by Sheringham Nursery. The purpose was to understand the facilitators and challenges to attendance.

Data collection

To ensure systematic data collection, interviews were conducted using topic guides. The research questions underpinned the development of the key themes covered in the topic guides. Key themes were set out and probes and prompts were added to allow for the full exploration of each theme. The topic guides were used in a flexible way, with researchers broadly aiming to cover the topic guide themes but allowing for new themes and issues to emerge during the interview discussions.

Observation templates were used to collect structured notes in a systematic way. The observation template covered themes related to the topics under discussion and the nature or content of discussions.

These documents are available in the Annex.

Data analysis

All interview data was audio recorded, professionally transcribed, and thematically coded using NatCen's Framework method.[6] The themes covered were based on the thematic coverage of the interviews and incorporated emerging themes. A thematic matrix was developed using the themes covered in interview topic guides and incorporating new emerging themes. Transcribed data was thematically summarised and illustrative verbatim quotes added. Framework maintains individual narratives and allows for thematic comparison and identification of areas of convergence and dissonance, adding richness to the analysis. Coaching session observation data, collected using a template, was used alongside the interview analysis to report on any issues or challenges discussed in coaching sessions.

[6] Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C. and Ormston, R. (2014) *Qualitative Research Practice* (2nd edn), London: Sage.

Timeline

Table 3 presents key dates and research activities for the evaluation.

Table 3: Timeline

Dates	Activity
September 2018	MoU issued and launch event observed
September 2018	Intervention starts
October 2018	Bespoke training observations and manager interviews
December 2018	Emerging findings workshop
Nov 18–April 19	Observation of coaching sessions
February 2019	In-depth setting-based research starts
April 2019	Emerging findings workshop
June 2019	Intervention ends
June 2019	End of fieldwork and MPT event organised by developer
August 2019	Emerging findings workshop
January 2020	Draft report submitted

Main Findings

The findings focus on two main topics: firstly, on the MPT training that was provided and setting staff's understanding of what Manor Park entails and, secondly, on practitioners' application of what they learned during training in their everyday practice with children. It sets out the challenges to delivery, the modifications made to optimise delivery, and the reported benefits of the training for practitioners as well as for children.
It is important to recall that MPT was designed as a whole-setting approach comprising five strategies associated with positive outcomes for early language development of children:

- conversational responsiveness;
- interactive book-reading as a way to start a conversation;
- using songs, rhymes, and stories to support expressing language;
- print referencing to support emergent literacy; and
- listening for sounds.

Within these strategies, references were made to specific techniques that practitioners could use when communicating with children. The full list of techniques covered in the training is on page 6, however the main techniques discussed by practitioners were:

- OWL: 'observe, wait, listen';
- four finger rule: making four comments to every question; and
- ten-second rule: giving children time to process what the practitioner has said.

Achieved sample

The research design and sampling approach were intended to capture the views of a range of participants. In addition, the design incorporated an in-depth capture of the perspectives of a small sample of nursery managers and staff (at five nurseries) at two points in time. The main purpose of this was to understand nursery approaches to the delivery of MPT over time. The proposed and achieved samples are set out in the table below.

Table 4: Proposed and achieved sample sizes

Study sample			
Phase	Participant type	Proposed	Achieved
Autumn term 2018	Managers	8	8
	Trainers (paired interview with 2 trainers)	1	1
Spring term 2019	In-depth research: manager and two staff (5 settings)	15	15
Summer term 2019	Follow-up research: managers and two staff (5 settings)	15	15
	Manager interviews at other 3 settings	3	3
	MPT Coach	1	1

Formative findings

The Manor Park Talks pilot set out to explore whether the skills and expertise of the early years workforce could be improved to support early language development of two year olds attending eight selected PVI nurseries across Manor Park. It attempted to do this by:

- developing a whole-setting approach to promoting children's communication by training managers and staff working in PVIs;

- encouraging a focus on implementing change, evaluating impact, and creating a local network for peer support and challenge by facilitating monthly coaching sessions for managers of PVIs and school based-nursery providers; and

- offering support to managers of PVIs for implementation of the programme by providing mentors from the teaching team at Sheringham Primary School and Nursery to visit each setting at least termly.

The pilot was initially focused on five strategies associated with positive outcomes for early language development:

- Conversational responsiveness
- Interactive book-reading
- Using songs, rhymes and stories to support expressing language
- Print referencing to support emergent literacy
- Listening for sounds.

Emerging findings were shared with Sheringham Nursery School at three points in time. The design of the intervention and the logic model were discussed and reviewed with the developers. As a result, the intervention was streamlined by reducing the number of strategies and a new poster was developed (see Appendix D).

Evidence from the pilot evaluation on the extent to which each of these core aims were met, the feasibility of the programme, and its readiness for scaling up across Newham form the basis of the rest of this report.

Usefulness of Manor Park Talks training

This section focuses on the initial launch event where training was delivered to setting managers, the bespoke training provided at each setting, and the coaching sessions.

Launch event

The launch event consisted of presentations about children's language and communication development and small group discussions among practitioners.

The overriding view of managers was that the launch event was helpful for understanding what MPT would involve. The trainers were considered knowledgeable and the videos they showed were thought to be particularly illustrative of what would be required to deliver MPT.

> *I like learning from people who know what they're talking about, and have experienced it (Manager 102).*

The networking aspect of the launch event was also valued and managers felt that meeting managers from other nurseries and discussing specific changes they would make was particularly useful. Managers were particularly interested in the audit tool that was shared at the event. Managers reported that the launch event also helped them to start thinking about changes they would make to their setting.

Although the later bespoke training was delivered to all staff, one view was that the launch event should not have been exclusive to managers as it was felt that staff could have benefited from attending it (even if the training was replicated during bespoke in-setting training).

Although all settings reported that they were focused on communication and language development, the launch event was seen as a useful reminder of the importance of how practitioners communicate with children and helped managers to understand gaps in practice. However, one concern after the training was that despite the enthusiasm of managers, MPT might lose momentum over time as this tends to happen even with worthwhile projects.

Overall, taking part in the MPT launch event provided an opportunity for managers to reinforce messages around improving practice that they had already identified as areas of development. Across all settings staff were not familiar with the techniques they were taught and were not using story books as tools for conversation. Therefore, what they learned during the training was new to them and different from their usual practice, which tended to be more about talking to children and asking closed questions rather than engaging children in conversations and helping them to extend their language. MPT fitted in well with the overall desire to improve children's language and communication,

During the launch event, managers mentioned the importance of covering English as an additional language and discussing how best to work with children who are exposed to languages other than English at home.

Bespoke training

Following the launch event, a 'bespoke' training session was delivered at each setting by independent consultants. The emphasis of the full-day training varied slightly based on priorities that managers identified for their setting. During the training managers and trainers identified gaps in staff knowledge around language and communication. The presentation the trainers delivered during the bespoke training was similar to that used at the launch event except for three modifications:

1. a slide, 'supporting children's learning as an additional language', was included following feedback at the launch event;
2. additional slides covering the nursery environment: 'What makes a good space?'; and
3. a walking tour of the nursery.

The training was interactive with practitioners taking part in paired and triad role-play sessions to try out different activities and techniques. Practitioners had time to reflect on the techniques and to discuss challenges of using these with children for whom English was an additional language. The triad role-play sessions, although slightly contrived, were well received as staff noted how the ten-seconds rule felt like a long time to wait for a child to respond but also expressed enthusiasm about applying the techniques with children. The walking tour of the nursery was to point out to staff areas for improvement such as the reading corner, the colours used, and the arrangement of equipment and materials. For managers and staff, the main interest was increasing their knowledge of children's early language and communication and developing skills to do so.

> *When I heard about it I was relieved because when I was with my staff I found that they're weak in this area* (MPT101; Manager).

Immediately after the bespoke training a key focus at the settings was on delivering manager and practitioner practice focused on the 'conversational responsiveness' strategy.

> *I would say the first one, conversational responsiveness, was a main one for me, because if you did that right, it flows in with the other two—interactive book reading and using songs and rhymes* (MPT111; Manager).

Staff reported finding the training helpful, especially the interactive role play sessions.

> *I really enjoyed it because we got to do role plays and stuff like that … One of us got to be a child and then one of us was being the practitioner … It's only when you, yourself, put yourself in that shoe, you think, okay, you know* (MPT103; Staff1).

However, there were some practical issues. For instance, technical issues with the projector, difficulties with gaining entry to settings, and confusion among attendees about the structure and content of the day. There was also a view that the training included too much content to be covered in one day.

> *It was really good training, but the trainer has to rush because there was too many things to deal with ... If we had the training in two sessions instead of the one whole big thing, I think it would be better for the teachers* (MPT101; Staff1).

A suggested solution was to spread the training over two days. For example, one training day in October and one in spring to refresh staff and support a phased approach to implementation. In addition, both managers and staff pointed to the desirability of having ongoing MPT training in settings to ensure staff properly understood and retained the strategies they had learnt. The extent to which this was considered necessary appeared to vary depending on the support staff felt they already had. For example, staff with a very supportive team expressed the view that additional support with the MPT pilot was not necessary. Staff who reported they had not seen much planning or observation in their setting struggled to remember details of MPT from the training and would have liked follow-up, in-setting training.

> *We don't really have a great understanding of what it's about because we just had one training and then we just got given the poster ... That's why I said it would be better if someone could come in and give more information* (MPT109; Staff2).

Across settings, the view was that more in-setting training from the MPT team would have been beneficial and that two training sessions per year would have been sufficient. There was also a view that managers should share the information they received in their training and coaching sessions with all staff and allow staff more input into planning.

Coaching sessions

The coaching sessions were designed to focus on improvement of leadership capacity and skills for managers to implement changes across their settings, with a particular focus on MPT. They were attended by the coaches, nursery managers, and staff from local school-based nurseries. Content included provision of tools for planning (for example the red, amber, green (RAG) rating system and development of an action plan) and sharing of techniques to evaluate the implementation of the programme.

MPT coaching sessions were received extremely well by managers. They provided new ideas for monitoring delivery and motivating staff, for instance sending staff to other settings to observe best practice. Managers were asked to keep 'learning logs' which were discussed. Managers described these sessions as helpful in keeping themselves motivated and retaining momentum in delivering MPT.

Accessing a network of more experienced managers from local school-based nurseries through the coaching sessions was considered particularly important by managers who were new to the role.

The red, amber, green (RAG) rating exercise, which was completed by managers during coaching, was seen as helpful in highlighting areas of development for MPT. It covered the key techniques of MPT and managers rated how well they were doing and discussed progress at setting level. It helped managers to articulate challenges and to plan delivery and monitor overall progress. Moreover, it helped managers to be more reflective, that is, instead of ticking off that they had applied a technique, it helped them reflect on how well it was applied and to discuss what further progress could be made.

> *[The RAG] was a really, really useful tool ... You're always reviewing and monitoring something so it can change to red, but then come a couple months or the next term it could be a green, instead of just ticking something because you've met it* (MPT109; Manager).

However, there were some barriers to attending the coaching sessions, including personal commitments and work-related pressures. Possible solutions to this were to have the coaching sessions during the working day or to allow staff other than managers to attend in addition or as cover.

From October 2018 to June 2019, eight of the nine planned coaching session were delivered. The coaching sessions in November 2018 and January 2019 were longer (1.5 hours each) to account for there being no session in December 2018. The remaining sessions were one hour long. One session in April was cancelled as the coach was unable to attend for personal reasons.

Managers from all nurseries attended three sessions only and three out of eight managers attended every coaching session. Average attendance across the year was 6.5.

Applying the training

As noted, there were five key strategies for trained staff to use when developing conversations with children (refer to intervention description):

- conversational responsiveness;
- interactive book-reading;
- using songs, rhymes, and stories to support expressing language;

- print referencing to support emergent literacy; and
- listening for sounds.

Across all settings, two strategies were implemented by practitioners: 'interactive book reading' and 'conversational responsiveness'. Practitioners also applied a sub-set of specific techniques associated with these two strategies. These specific techniques were:

- OWL;
- the ten-second rule; and
- the four-finger rule.

Managers and staff also discussed using other techniques when implementing MPT, such as going to the child's level, having eye-contact with children, awareness of their body language, extending vocabulary, and asking open-ended questions.

The remaining strategies included in the intervention were largely not covered by settings. Reasons given for this included the view that implementing and monitoring the additional strategies would be too challenging or time-consuming, that the first two strategies were more 'effective' for their setting, and that practitioners used specific techniques when a situation with a child allowed this.

Managers and staff also discussed using techniques that were not part of the MPT training but were thought to be useful for encouraging communication and language development. For instance, talking positively to children, giving them praise and feedback, narrating what the child is doing, focusing on specific sounds during phonics, and increasing 'messy play'. Staff viewed these as complementary techniques to use alongside MPT.

Settings had different implementation and delivery plans in place, reflecting the iterative nature of the project and the trainers' suggestion to use what they could in daily practice. The different delivery models included:

- implementing one strategy such as conversational responsiveness for a specific amount of time (one term, half a term);
- using specific elements of MPT based on feedback from ITERS-3; and
- applying a particular technique, for example, the ten-seconds rule.

There were two ways in which settings applied 'interactive book reading'. One approach was to use techniques specifically discussed under 'interactive book reading' at the bespoke training, such as using a story book as a tool to engage children in conversation. The other approach involved using techniques not included in the training such as improving the book corner, giving parents links to websites focused on reading with children, and letting children take turns to read.

This 'mixing and matching' approach is likely a reflection of the developmental and adaptive nature of MPT delivery and practitioners considering MPT as comprising techniques that could be incorporated into existing practice.

Even though there were instances of practitioners sharing information about early language and communication with parents, they were not speaking to parents specifically about MPT. The developers acknowledged parental engagement as a gap which was addressed at the end of the evaluation (refer to the revised MPT poster in Appendix D).

In some instances, there was particular confusion around the ITERS-3 Environment rating scale which the developers used to assess settings at the start of the intervention. The results of the ITERS-3 assessment were shared with staff, which led to some thinking that changes needed to be made in relation to the assessment. Changes at setting level based on ITERS-3 scores included the practice of washing hands at snack times and increasing the frequency of communication with children. Those who implemented changes based on findings from the ITERS-3 assessment reported that these changes had taken priority over the MPT strategies.

Monitoring of Manor Park Talks within settings

Managers and staff felt that delivery of MPT relied on the strategies and techniques becoming habitual across their daily practice and interactions with children.

> *I would say that whenever they're doing activities, they should be using those targets. Like, to become their habit. Activities they're doing, all during the day, all day. Even their snack time, even their lunchtime … Just to make sure that it becomes their habit* (MPT105; Manager).

This corresponds to what the intervention was designed to achieve: practitioners becoming more reflective of their practice and attempting to apply MPT techniques as routine practice.

Monitoring MPT progress was carried out by managers using two approaches. The first was to review staff developmental needs and set individual targets for MPT techniques; the other was to establish a setting-level target for all staff. There were no reported challenges to using either approach and across settings monitoring practice included formal peer-to-peer observations, informal peer feedback from overhearing other staff interacting with children in the setting, and manager-led observations.

At the start of implementation, managers reported finding the audit tool—which was introduced alongside MPT—useful in assessing their setting. Towards the end of the intervention delivery period, managers had stopped using the audit tool. Instead, they described using existing checklists or creating a new one to monitor progress in the use of MPT techniques. However, staff reported using the audit tool to monitor their own progress throughout the pilot.

Promotion of children's early communication skills within settings

Managers and staff generally spoke positively of the training and programme.

> *If you learn the strategies from Manor Park Talk project, it will help you to improve on your language, the way you think, the way you interact with the children. It will change your outlook towards the children and the way you actually interact with the children* (MPT105; Staff2).

MPT provided a useful reminder of the importance of communication and language development for children and gave an opportunity for managers to reinforce messages around improved practice that they had already identified as areas of development.

However, managers and staff tended to focus on the continuation of specific techniques rather than an overall promotion and focus on early communication. There was also a lack of consistency around how the intervention would continue into the following year. The underlying assumption was that once applying conversational responsiveness techniques became embedded in practice, practitioners would continue to do this without the need for further training. However, nursery managers and staff expressed a preference for additional training and some concern about ensuring new staff knew what to do given the high turnover in the sector. One perspective was that the managers would deliver their own training for staff, but given the differing approaches across settings, there could be issues around consistency of content delivery and overall understanding of how early communication can be promoted within the setting using MPT.

Benefits of Manor Park Talks for early years staff

In-setting bespoke training

While managers had positive views on the launch event and the training it provided, they particularly appreciated the in-setting bespoke training. Both managers and staff felt that more in-setting, bespoke training would have been beneficial. They valued the opportunity it provided to reflect on their practice, to identify areas for improvement that were relevant to their setting, and to receive tailored advice.

> *When they asked us what areas we were struggling [with] or what areas we'd like to improve, that helped, because then we can actually look at our own areas in our setting and see where we need to improve ourselves. That's something that's more catering [to] your setting* (MPT101; Staff2).

Managers described how staff had been motivated by the training to implement some changes within days of receiving it—for example, proactively amending weekly plans to incorporate MPT strategies and techniques.

Improved reflective practice among managers and staff

Managers commented on the usefulness of meeting with other managers during coaching sessions to reflect on common challenges and discuss potential strategies to overcome barriers for implementation. The shared learning from the school-based nursery staff was also recognised by the coach who delivered the sessions. It allowed staff to seek additional information and advice where they were struggling.

> *Speaking to all the other managers involved, they just had so many ideas and I just wrote everything down constantly in my notebook. I'd be like, 'right, we're doing this, we're doing that'. Just a lot of things to try to put things in practice* (MPT112; Manager).

Staff also felt MPT had introduced new ideas, provided opportunities to reflect on and receive feedback on their practice, and increased their confidence during interactions with children. They noticed changes in how children were communicating and demonstrated an increased knowledge of self-assessment as shown in the quote below.

> *Sometimes you don't know; you think you know you're doing something right but when we actually had the training, we were like, 'No, oh my God, that's … we need to improve on that …' Even [the action plan]—it becomes a goal and then you look back on it in the end and see if you've met the goals* (MPT103; Staff1).

Waiting for children and not interrupting them were two specific changes that staff said they had noted in their practice.

> *We're having that conversation with the child because we're waiting and then instead of us interrupting them, they're actually taking their time to say what they want* (MPT103; Staff 2).

Other aspects of changes in practice reported by staff were:

- talking at children's 'level' by noting what they are interested in;
- giving children the language they need to communicate more;
- observing children more; and
- more free-flowing conversation between practitioner and child.

Benefits to children

Overall, managers and staff felt children at their setting were benefitting from MPT.

> *Now that [staff] are showing interest in the child and actually just noticing them, the kids can pick up on that and they want to speak to them more and then it's just creating way more conversations than there were before* (MPT112; Manager).

The perceived benefits of using MPT that managers and staff discussed included increases in:

- children's vocabulary and the amount that children talk;
- the number of books children read and their enjoyment of reading;
- engagement during story times; and
- confidence in communicating with practitioners.

By applying the ten-seconds rule, staff reported noticing an increase in the amount that quieter children, those with SEND, or those with EAL interacted and engaged in conversation.

> *He's one of the quieter children … I've been doing the waiting and the listening, and it's really, really worked. I've heard his voice. I hadn't heard it for a whole year* (MPT103; Staff 1).

Staff also described children engaging in a range of activities not directly related to MPT as a benefit. For example, staff observed increased engagement in music activities and maths.

Barriers and facilitators for engagement in Manor Park Talks

Staff motivation and understanding

Interviews with managers highlighted challenges in keeping staff motivated to engage with MPT on an ongoing basis. On the one hand, managers reflected on staff's positive reactions:

> *They're quite keen to learn, so they were excited* (Manager 109).

However, it was also noted that maintaining changed habits among staff would be challenging:

> *[They have] not outright said, 'I don't want to do that. That's stupid.' [They are] on board with it but … doesn't really shift and it'll take longer to get [them] into the habit* (Manager 112).

Strategies successfully adopted by managers to overcome this challenge included setting individual MPT-related targets for staff and involving them in peer-to-peer and manager-led observations. This was not part of the delivery model but was an approach taken by managers to monitor how the techniques were being implemented.

> *That's the hard bit, to motivate staff to do the things constantly. They will do it for a while, and then they just don't keep it up … I just gave them individual tasks … One target each person, so they can apply it in their practice, and then to observe others* (MPT105; Manager).

The presence of staff at the nursery who were new to the role was also reported as a barrier to engagement. These staff were still developing basic early years skills and in some cases English was not their first language. Managers felt this affected their capacity to understand MPT strategies as they needed to focus on mastering the basics of their role before focusing on delivery of the programme.

> *Senior members are fine because once I tell them something, they understand exactly what I'm talking about. Then when you go and tell your other three members of staff, then they might not understand what you're talking about because they're still learning about the EYFS* (MPT103; Manager).

Staff confirmed the difficulties experienced by new staff when implementing MPT. They also highlighted how more established and experienced staff could provide crucial support for new staff.

Notably, the opposite challenge was also reported: there was a view that it was easier to engage newer staff as they were more receptive compared to established members who had ingrained ways of working.

Where staff were struggling to understand MPT, one strategy was for managers and staff to record themselves so other staff could see them practically implementing techniques and draw on their example.

> *I think it was just getting the whole staff team on board … Some understand, some not quite there … [The manager] and I have started recording ourselves so that they can see us in action, what we're doing and how* (MPT103; Staff2).

A further barrier to engagement was staff turnover, which meant some staff members had not received MPT training. In these instances, managers saw training staff in MPT as a separate training need rather than part of training staff in the overall setting procedures. The results of turnover were more prominent in smaller settings where only a small number of staff had received the bespoke training. Approaches to addressing this included cascading information to new staff through regular sessions and having more experienced staff modelling MPT techniques.

Programme scope and content

A key barrier to delivering MPT according to managers was the number of strategies the programme involved. One method for overcoming this barrier was to phase implementation and focus on a few strategies to enable staff to

successfully use them. After revision of the intervention had been discussed (at the first early findings workshops), the developers shared this with the coach who then communicated this to setting managers.

Reflecting this concern, managers expressed relief that coaches had asked nurseries to focus on the first two strands of MPT—conversational responsiveness and interactive book-reading as a sub-area of conversational responsiveness—as they were worried staff would not have been able to master all strategies. They also stressed the importance of staff becoming skilled in the first two strategies before moving on to the latter ones.

> *At first, I thought, 'Oh my God, they're not going to be able to master this and then move on to the next strategy.' Thankfully, they didn't have to … I think [conversational responsiveness and interactive book-reading] are the two slightly more important ones and the easiest ones* (MPT112; Manager).

Another approach for addressing the number of MPT strategies was to remind staff about them—for example, by having prompts around the nursery such as reminders on the activity tables or a list of words and phrases that could be used to praise something a child has done—and by staff members reminding each other to use the strategies when they could.

> *If you go in any of the areas, you will see these labels, which it says, 'OWL', and then it said, 'Five, four comments, one question.' So immediately you would refer to it. That's how it made me more confident* (MPT112; Staff2).

Manager and peer observations were also found to be useful in encouraging take-up of MPT strategies and increasing staff confidence in using them.

> *Sometimes the managers … will just come and observe us, and constant reminders. These little, little things have really helped us … it's boosting our confidence and making us more and more confident enough with the talking project* (MPT105; Staff2).

Competing commitments

Another key barrier to delivering Manor Parks Talks was managers and staff having competing commitments and priorities. They were therefore unable to dedicate as much time and focus to MPT as they felt was necessary.

Finding time for monitoring and provision of feedback was sometimes difficult due to staff working patterns. Feedback sessions or staff meetings were sometimes limited to every half term. Given these issues it may be difficult for managers to sustain the monitoring and feedback levels facilitated by the coaching sessions when these are no longer available.

Importantly, staff also explained that if they were responsible for a group of children (which, in most cases, they were), applying MPT techniques required focusing on one child at a time, which was not always possible. The way they managed this was by interacting with a child while children were engaged in play or other activities.

The cost to nurseries

To develop an understanding of the cost to nurseries of taking part in the pilot, setting managers were asked to complete a short form setting out the time that staff spent attending MPT training and coaching sessions and any additional staff time spent on planning, monitoring, and meetings (including mentor visits). Although nurseries were not required to purchase any materials or equipment, nurseries may have purchased materials such as books or other equipment to support the 'interactive book reading' strategy. As such, a cost for any equipment purchased was also requested.

Of the eight nurseries taking part, only seven submitted cost data as one nursery had to close during the intervention delivery period. On average, nurseries reported that participating in the pilot required 137 hours of staff time and a spend of £221 on materials. We did not estimate a per-pupil cost for two reasons: firstly, the intervention was in development therefore a per-pupil cost would not be an accurate indication of what it would cost a nursery to take part in the training and implement it and secondly, as we were not interested pupil-level outcome data, we did not collect

pupil information.[7] A breakdown of the average time that nurseries reported staff spending on each activity, and the range, is provided in the table below.

Staff time spent on MPT	Staff time (hours)	
	Avg	Range
Launch event attendance	8	3–12
Bespoke training (including planning)	82	26–164
Coaching sessions	7	1–10
On-going planning, mentoring, meetings	40	6–278
Total	137	71–244

These averages should be treated with caution due to the small number of nurseries taking part and large variation in staff numbers. The key areas of variation are:

- The number of staff reported to have spent time on the intervention ranged from 4 to 23.
- The number of staff hours ranged from 71 to 244. In particular, the time spent on the bespoke training ranged from 26 to 164 hours and the time spent on planning, mentoring, and staff meetings varied from 6 to 160 hours. This variation somewhat, but not wholly, reflected the variation in the number of staff involved.
- The spend on materials varied from zero to £800. This could be due to one nursery requiring the purchase of a substantial amount of equipment while others already had the resources required. However, data from the evaluation does not provide an explanation of the differences in cost.

Because of these limitations of the cost data gathered, and because the intervention was being developed during the course of the evaluation, we have not provided a per-pupil cost for this pilot. Pupil-level data was not collected as the focus of the formative study was on practitioners training and change to practice as a result.

[7] To be able to make an accurate per-pupil estimate, we would have had to collect information on children's attendance (whether they attend part-time or full-time) and also monitor pupil numbers as well as changes to patterns of attendance over time as this can vary a lot within nursery settings. Our decision was based on the research burden to nurseries of collecting this type of pupil-level data during a developmental phase of the intervention.

Conclusions

Research question	Finding
Is there evidence to support the theory of change?	Practitioners reported being more reflective of their own practice than before being part of the programme, finding opportunities for one-to-one interactions with children based on MPT techniques, with reported improvements in children's language and communication. There is some evidence to suggest that staff were engaging more in conversations with children and felt more confident in doing so. Staff reported that shy children seemed to engage more in conversation as a result of staff using conversational responsiveness techniques. As implementation was often phased, with nurseries choosing to focus on one to two specific techniques at any one point in time, an overall assessment of success cannot be made.
Is the approach feasible to deliver?	The pilot of the Manor Park Talks programme demonstrated to managers that there was a knowledge gap and an interest in learning new ways of improving children's early language and communication. The interviews suggest that settings continued to deliver MPT techniques in a flexible way throughout the school year with some indication that they were becoming embedded in daily practice. This formative evaluation helped the developers to refine the intervention so that it would be more appealing to early years practitioners. The revised version of MPT focuses on conversational responsiveness and was therefore easier to apply than the full set of strategies outlined in the initial design. MPT is replicable in its current form although further clarity is needed on the role of mentors.
Is the intervention ready for scaling up across Newham?	Based on staff reports, we know that nurseries were continuing to apply the MPT techniques that they had learned, albeit in a range of ways. The revised intervention focusing only on conversational responsiveness can be implemented across all settings in Newham.

Using the findings from the evaluation, this section considers the feasibility of delivering MPT as intended and reflects on the adaptations made. It considers the two components of MPT—the training for staff and the subsequent application of learning into everyday practice with children. It further considers the support for the programme rationale (evidence of promise), whether it is ready to be scaled-up, and the limitations of the research.

Manor Park Talks training and ongoing support

Primarily a continuous professional development opportunity for early years staff, the key training elements of MPT were delivered successfully for participating nurseries. This included the launch event, bespoke training, and coaching sessions. Although a mentor (usually a teacher from Sheringham Primary School and Nursery) visited nurseries, this was not identified as a distinct support activity by nursery managers.

The launch event was valued by managers who found the content useful, and having participated, found that the topics covered reflected the knowledge gaps among their staff. This helped managers to start a reflective process on practice in relation to early language and communication development at their nursery. Moreover, group discussions with other managers was felt to be valuable as they did not often get a chance to take part in knowledge-sharing activities. Managers reflected that it would have been helpful for their staff to attend the launch event and to meet staff from other nurseries to share ideas and challenges.

Similarly, the bespoke training was an important opportunity for staff to come together to learn new skills. The triad groups for staff to practice specific techniques developed staff awareness, showing them, for example, how difficult it could be to apply techniques such as waiting ten seconds for a child to respond. Managers suggested that additional

group training sessions at the nursery would have helped to reinforce learning and keep staff motivated and on track to embed MPT techniques.

The coaching sessions for managers were reported to be an important forum for learning how to plan implementation and discuss emerging challenges. A combination of multiple training sessions for all staff along with the coaching sessions may be an optimum model to keep both managers and staff engaged and motivated over time.

The mentoring aspect of the support was less clearly articulated and not talked about by managers or staff as a distinct element of MPT. This aspect and the role of mentors could be made more explicit to nurseries at the outset.

The overriding impression was that staff at these nurseries did not often get the opportunity to participate in training as a group and MPT training offered a platform to learn together on a topic which managers acknowledged was a knowledge and skills gap for staff.

Applying learning

Although staff valued the training sessions and demonstrated an eagerness to apply the new techniques with children, the full set of strategies that practitioners were first introduced to was daunting. As a result, managers and staff took the decision to focus on what they felt was feasible. Nurseries were also encouraged during training sessions to take a flexible approach without any one strategy being discussed as a priority. This meant that each nursery took a different approach to implementing MPT and all focused on a few techniques covering conversational responsiveness and interactive book-reading. Their main focus was to try and practice a few techniques so as to embed these in daily practice.

The formative nature of the evaluation meant that these emerging findings were shared with the developers at three points in time—December 2018, April 2019, and June 2019. During the December workshop, two main issues were discussed. The first was that practitioners had not fully understood the key principles around ‘interactive book reading’, which was to use story books as tools to engage children in conversation. The second was the confusion caused by the number of strategies and specific techniques forming MPT. There was acknowledgement that the five strategies initially set out, and the specific techniques, were interlinked and the separation into strategies may have caused this confusion.

As a consequence, a decision was made that MPT was primarily an intervention about conversational responsiveness and the specific techniques to improve conversational responsiveness (such as the four finger rule) also included interactive book reading. This adaptation was communicated with nurseries towards the beginning of the spring term (early 2019) at a coaching session. For the remainder of the delivery period (that is, until July 2019), managers were asked to focus only on the conversational responsiveness strategy (with shared book-reading as a component of this) along with the associated techniques. This was the only revision made to the intervention and reflected what nurseries were focusing on delivering.

This provided settings with clarity on what they needed to do and what they could ignore. Based on this change, the developers started a process to modify the poster issued to nurseries describing MPT strategies and techniques. Nurseries found it much easier to focus on implementing techniques for conversational responsiveness and were continuing to implement some of them by the time final data collection was conducted towards the end of the summer term. Nursery staff indicated that they would continue to apply MPT techniques in the coming year as they had seen change in their own practice and, as a result, in some cases, reported that they had observed improvements in how children engaged in conversation. The techniques that staff learned and applied were new and distinct from previous usual practice.

The new poster (Appendix D) is focused on having conversations with children in two mutually reinforcing ways: the first, by using books to start and extend conversations, and the second, by engaging children in conversation using specific techniques.

The instability of the sector—evidenced by one nursery in the pilot closing down—and the fragility of the workforce are likely to remain structural issues that affect the continued implementation of MPT.

Evidence to support the MPT rationale

The logic model set out at the start of the intervention went through two iterations. Initially, following the five MPT strategies, the logic model covered each strategy separately. However, given the links between the strategies and specific techniques, and following the first set of emerging findings, the logic model was aligned to the change in the intervention. As some of the strategies were dropped, the logic model for the revised intervention focuses on MPT as an intervention which is about conversational responsiveness, that is, 'listening to children and having conversations with them'. Shared book-reading, previously 'interactive book-reading', is included as a conversational responsiveness technique instead of as a separate strategy. Figure **1** shows the logic model at the conclusion of the evaluation (the original logic model is in Appendix C).

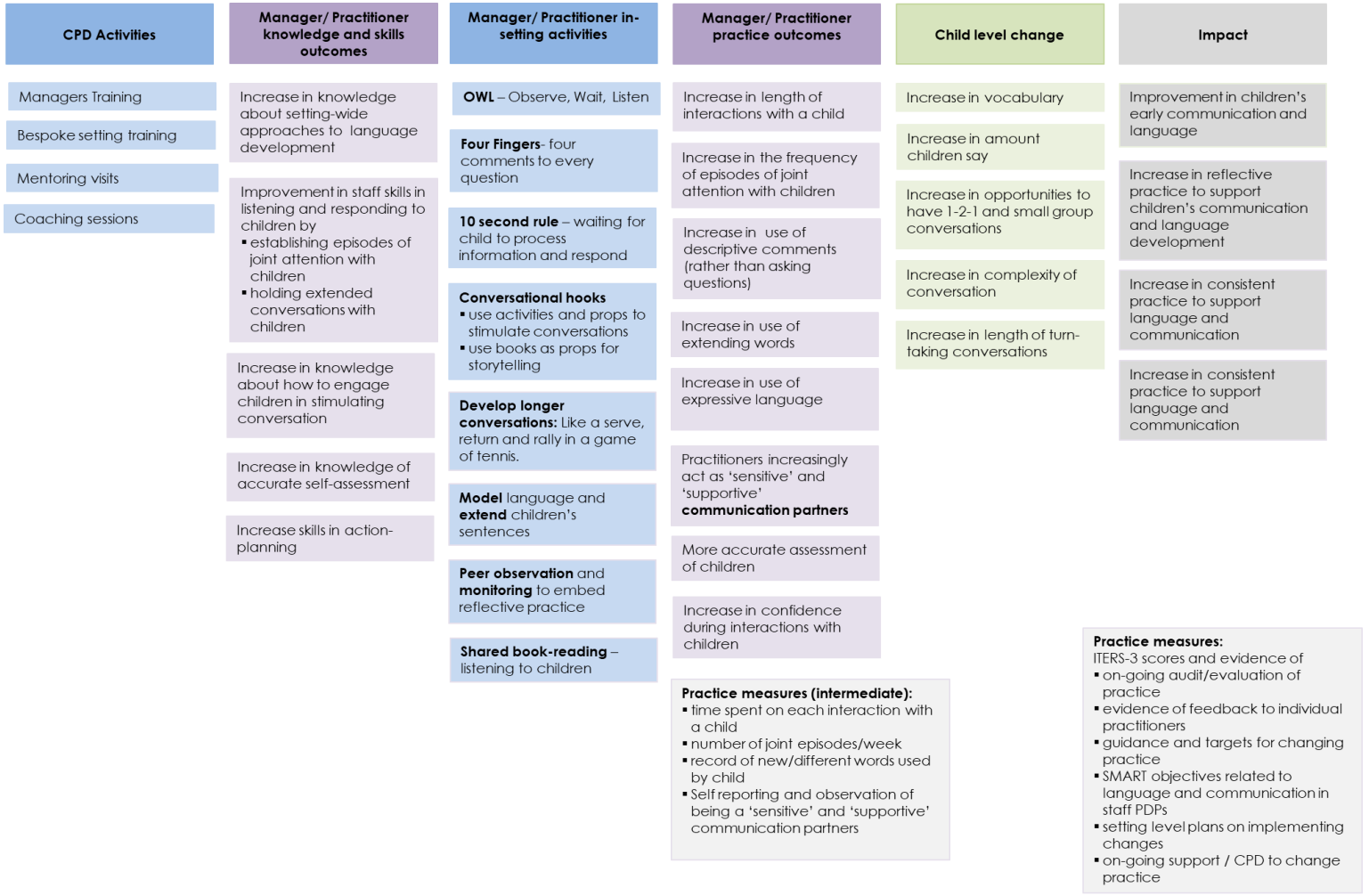
In relation to the training component of the logic model, all activities were delivered and the evidence indicates that these were well received by nursery managers and their staff. Managers reported that they would have welcomed further in-setting training sessions to keep staff motivated and to help ensure that practice was becoming embedded. Staff perspectives suggest that the training was successful in building staff capability and increasing their knowledge in relation to engaging children in conversations. Staff indicated being more aware of their own practice and demonstrating a level of reflexivity and self-assessment.

The outcome 'increase skills in action planning' refers specifically to nursery managers. This was covered primarily in coaching sessions, which managers found useful. However, it is unclear to what extent planning for MPT has become routine and the reported time spent on planning over the course of the year seems to be too onerous. It is also unclear how much time developers expected nurseries to spend on planning beyond attendance at training and coaching sessions.

As noted in the logic model, practitioners were expected to implement specific techniques with children and to use these as often as possible. Because no observations of practitioner-child interactions were conducted, it is not possible to state how and to what extent practice changed. Iters-3 data that Sheringham collected may shed more light on changes to practice. As implementation was often phased with nurseries choosing to focus on one to two specific techniques at any one point in time, an overall assessment of success cannot be made. Staff reported that they were engaging more in conversations with children and felt more confident in doing so. In addition, staff commented that they had observed benefits for children, especially shy children, who seemed to engage more in conversation as a result of applying conversational responsiveness techniques.

As this was a formative study, revisions to the logic model were discussed at each emerging findings workshop. However, a final, revised version was not agreed until after the last workshop which took place in June 2019. Alongside the revised logic model, the developers also suggested a range of possible practice measures, which are set out alongside the logic model. However, as the intervention has been revised, the logic model may need a further review based on the new poster. Measuring the impacts of MPT was outside the scope of the formative design of this evaluation and also not possible because the intervention was in a developmental stage.

Figure 1: Manor Park Talks logic model—final version



Readiness for scaling-up across Newham

The intention was always to deliver MPT across all nurseries in Newham. The pilot in Manor Park demonstrated that there was a knowledge gap among nursery staff, and an interest in learning new ways of improving children's early language and communication. The formative evaluation helped the developers to refine the intervention so that it would be more appealing to early years practitioners. This was done by reducing the scope of the intervention so that the streamlined or optimised version reflects what is achievable for practitioners, even if the delivery approach is phased and varies across nurseries. The revised intervention is more focused and the new poster is clearer in explaining what practitioners need to do (Appendix D). It also sets out activities for parents to support engagement with their children and thereby acknowledges the importance of the home learning environment for children's early language and communication development.

The revised intervention was different from what constitutes usual practice in participating settings. During the bespoke training, staff indicated that they had not used the specified techniques before and that by applying the techniques they were spending more time listening and conversing with children and using story books differently, that is, they were using them as props for starting and extending conversations with children rather than reading stories to the children. This indicates that these techniques were new to staff. If the training is amended to focus specifically on the revised version—with specific implementation guidelines—the training could have sufficient specificity to allow for further study.

Based on staff reports, we know that nurseries were continuing to apply the techniques that they had learned even if these involved implementing MPT in a range of ways. Nurseries will need clarity why the Iters-3 measure may be used and what purpose it serves for MPT.

Nurseries taking part in the pilot emphasised that it was important to give staff sufficient time to engage fully with MPT but in a staged way so that staff could successfully apply one or two techniques before moving on to use others. One suggestion was to set small, achievable targets with specific deadlines and provide staff with adequate support.

Limitations and future research

The pilot was conducted on a relatively small scale involving twelve nurseries at the initial recruitment stage with four dropping out relatively early. Direct data collection was conducted with staff from eight settings only. The MPT intervention was in a developmental stage and the regular review and refinement meant that implementation parameters changed after one term when the scale of what needed to be delivered (five strategies) was reduced to one main strategy—conversational responsiveness with shared book-reading as a component. While this optimisation was welcomed by nurseries, it is possible that early years practitioners did not have sufficient time to implement the adapted intervention fully and any evidence to support the intervention rationale (achieving its stated aims) should be treated with caution.

It was evident from the pilot that among early years practitioners there is great interest in taking up professional development opportunities. Despite contextual challenges of staff turnover and a precarious infrastructure, staff were interested in enhancing their capability to support children with their early language and communication.

As MPT will be scaled up across Newham, it would be important to study implementation across a larger group of nurseries and observe whether training has been adapted to focus on the optimised and more specific intervention. Moreover, recording progress using the practice outcomes identified alongside the revised logic model would help to better understand whether MPT achieves its aims of improving children's early language and communication. Any further research on MPT should aim to directly observe children's language-use, which was not possible during this study.

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Appendix A Original MPT Poster

Manor Park Talks

Effective ways to help children's early language development.

We are learning all the time in this project: this poster will change and get better as a result of the work we do together.

We want to help children with their early language development. That means we need to do more than just giving them appropriate environments and activities. The best way we can help children is by having high-quality conversations and interactions with them every day.

Strategies associated with positive outcomes	What we will notice children doing	What adults could do	What adults could provide	
Conversational responsiveness	• Increasing the amount they say. • Increasing the number of turns they can maintain a conversation for. • Increase the complexity of their conversation.	• Focus our attention where the child's attention is. • Notice the child's communication (verbal and non-verbal) • Comment/narrate/describe • Wait – give children more time to process and respond when we say something to them. • Add a word or two words, recast or extend • Respond using our knowledge of the individual child. • Limit questions • Display active listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding, or smiling	• Time to talk – not always being busy doing other things. • Spaces which promote conversation – not noisy. Comfortable places to sit and talk. • Engage children with expressive language in daily routines and naturally occurring situations	
Interactive book-reading	• Talking and engaging actively with the book, not just sitting quietly and listening. • Making individual comments about the book. • Making links between the book and their own ideas and experiences.	• Comment - modelling literal and inferential responses • Use questions sparingly with type and focus dependent on child's development • Give children time and opportunities to share their own ideas about the book. • Embedding prompts for children to talk at both a literal and inferential level about vocabulary in the story.	• Enticing spaces for individual curling up with a book and for sharing books. • Small group and 1:1 reading time. • A wide range of books which match the many different interests of the children in the setting.	
Using songs, rhymes and stories to support expressive language	• Singing or talking to themselves using the rhythm and some of the words of familiar songs and rhymes • Acting out familiar stories on their own or with others • Singing and acting out rhymes and stories using props	• Use songs and rhymes throughout the day and during everyday activities • Model how you can change the words and still rhyme • Make songs, rhymes and stories personal to individual children • Model the use of props in songs, rhymes and stories. • Support children to 'replay the story' using props at story times and throughout the session.	• A shared repertoire of songs, rhymes and stories • Small world play, puppets, dressing up clothes, trips and other resources/activities linked to popular songs and books. • Provide props that will help to support understanding of key concepts • Engaging environmental print. • Musical instruments and other resources which promote careful listening	
Print referencing to support emergent literacy	• Talking about their interpretation of a poster, a picture, the illustrations in a book • Talking about the features of print: e.g. a brand they recognise, a letter from their name.	• Talk about book illustrations and words • Point out familiar print when out in the neighbourhood; point out meaningful print in the setting e.g. names. • Use activities to develop phonological awareness through rhymes, music etc.	• Displays of print in the environment through songs, rhymes and stories	
Listening for sounds	• Displaying beginnings of sound awareness • Associating sounds with familiar objects	• Encourage children to listen for sounds in the environment and letter sounds. • Engage children in activities that associate a variety of objects and toys with letter sounds.	• Games and play that encourage listening for sounds • Everyday activities that help support sound association and differentiation	

Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre

National Teaching School designated by National College for Teaching & Leadership

East London Partnership

Education Endowment Foundation

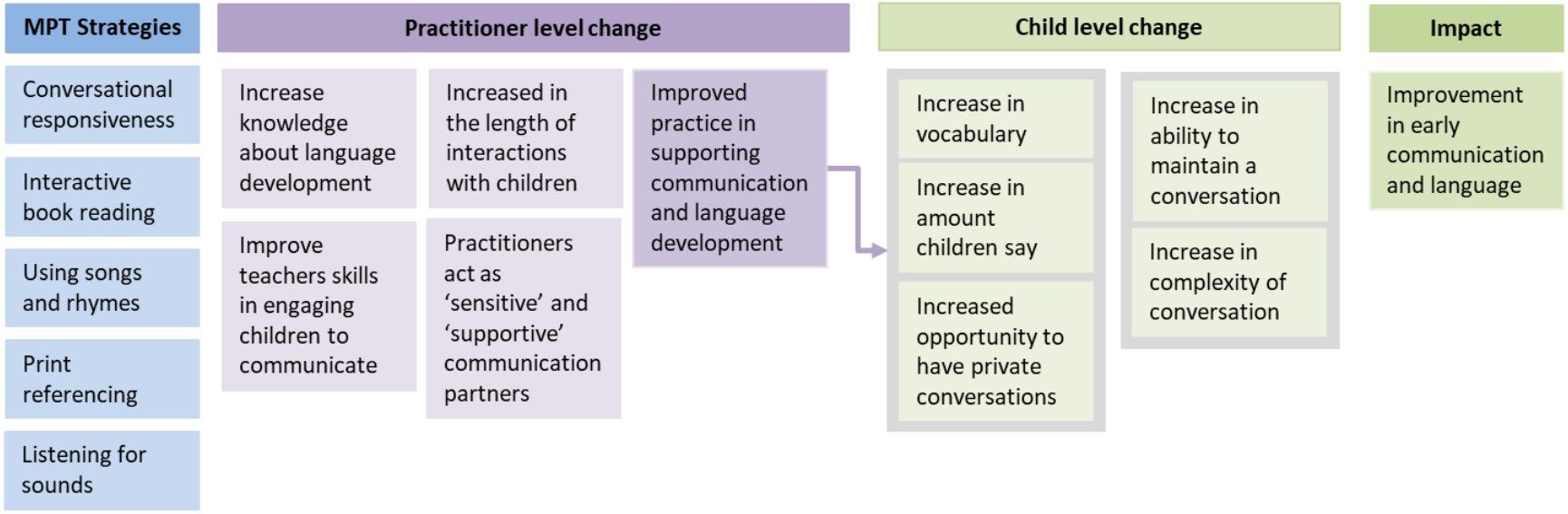
UCL Institute of Education

Appendix B Research Questions

IPE Category	Research Questions	Research Questions
Evidence of Promise	RQ1	What is the intervention logic and what need does it address?
	RQ2	What are the potential benefits, if any of the intervention for Early Years staff?
	RQ3	What are the perceived potential benefits for children?
	RQ4	Do there appear to be any unintended consequences or negative effects?
Feasibility	RQ5	Was the intervention delivered as intended?
	RQ6	Did the intervention reach its target audiences?
	RQ7	What were the barriers/facilitators to engagement?
	RQ8	What are practitioners' perceptions of the training?
	RQ9	What are managers and EY leads perceptions of the monthly coaching and sharing best practice sessions?
	RQ10	Are practitioners receiving the right amount of training and support?
	RQ11	What are the barriers and facilitators to professional development? How does this vary across sites?
	RQ12	Do practitioners believe that the intervention is the appropriate approach to improving children's language and communication development?
	RQ13	Have practitioners been able to apply learning to their classroom practice in the intended way?
Readiness for scaling-up across Newham	RQ14	Does the intervention have sufficient specificity for scaling-up?
	RQ15	Are there identifiable 'components' within the intervention? How may these be assessed?
	RQ16	How can delivery be optimised?
	RQ17	What data indicators could be used to provide evidence of impact on intended outcomes?
	RQ18	Are there any key contextual factors that appear to facilitate or impede successful implementation?
	RQ19	Is the intervention considered to be affordable?
	RQ20	Can the intervention be delivered to scale? What level of flexibility/adaptation is acceptable?

Appendix C Initial MPT logic model

Manor Park Talks – overarching Logic Model



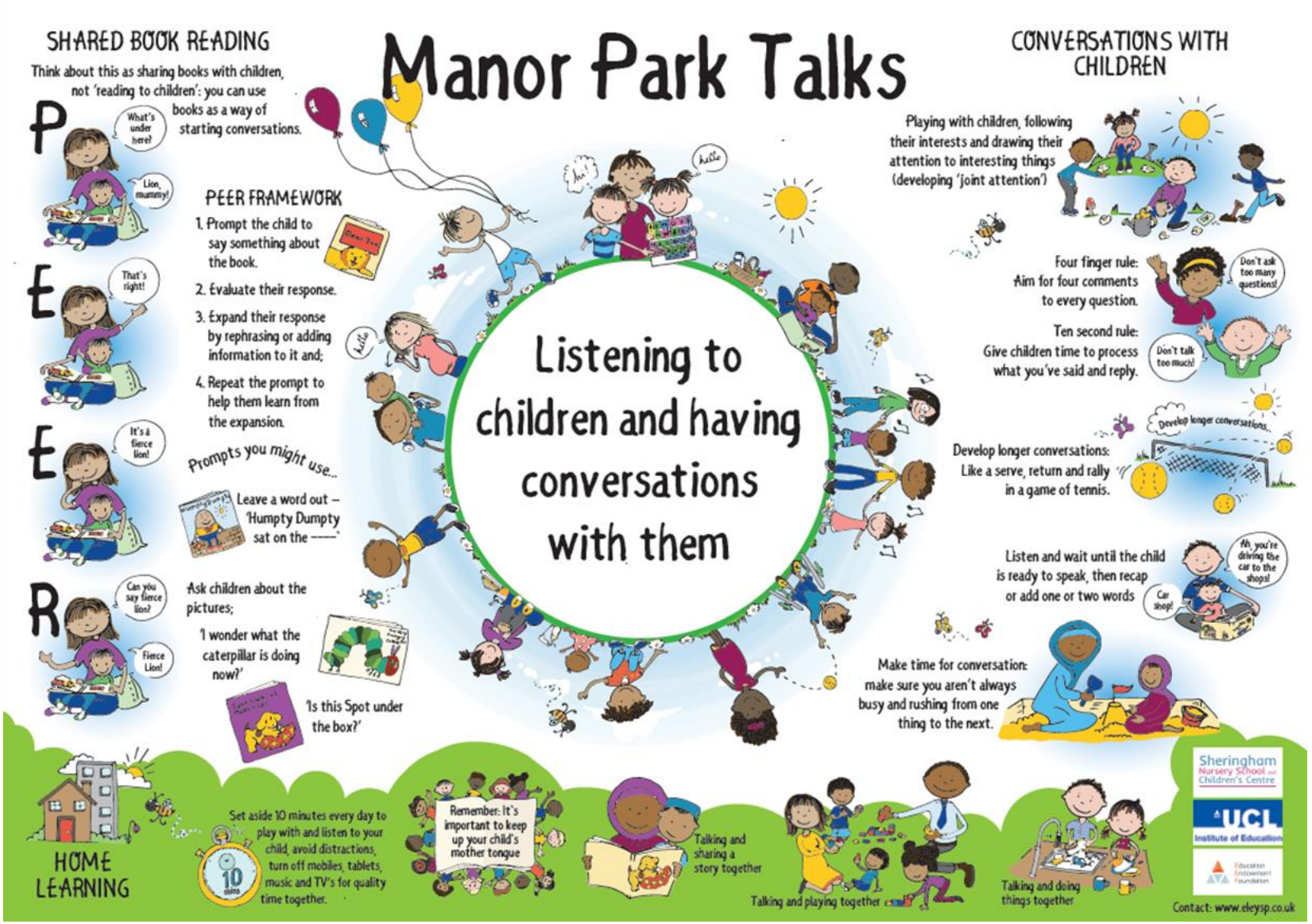
Manor Park Talks – Strategies

Conversational responsiveness	Practitioner level change		Practitioner-child interaction	
OWL – Observe, Wait, Listen	Increased focus on what children are doing	Increase in time spend with a child	Increased turn-taking in a conversation	Conversations increasingly led by child
Four Finger rule - four comments to every question	Increased use of descriptive comments (rather than asking questions)	Increase in use of extending words	Increased use of language manners	
		Increase in use of expressive language		

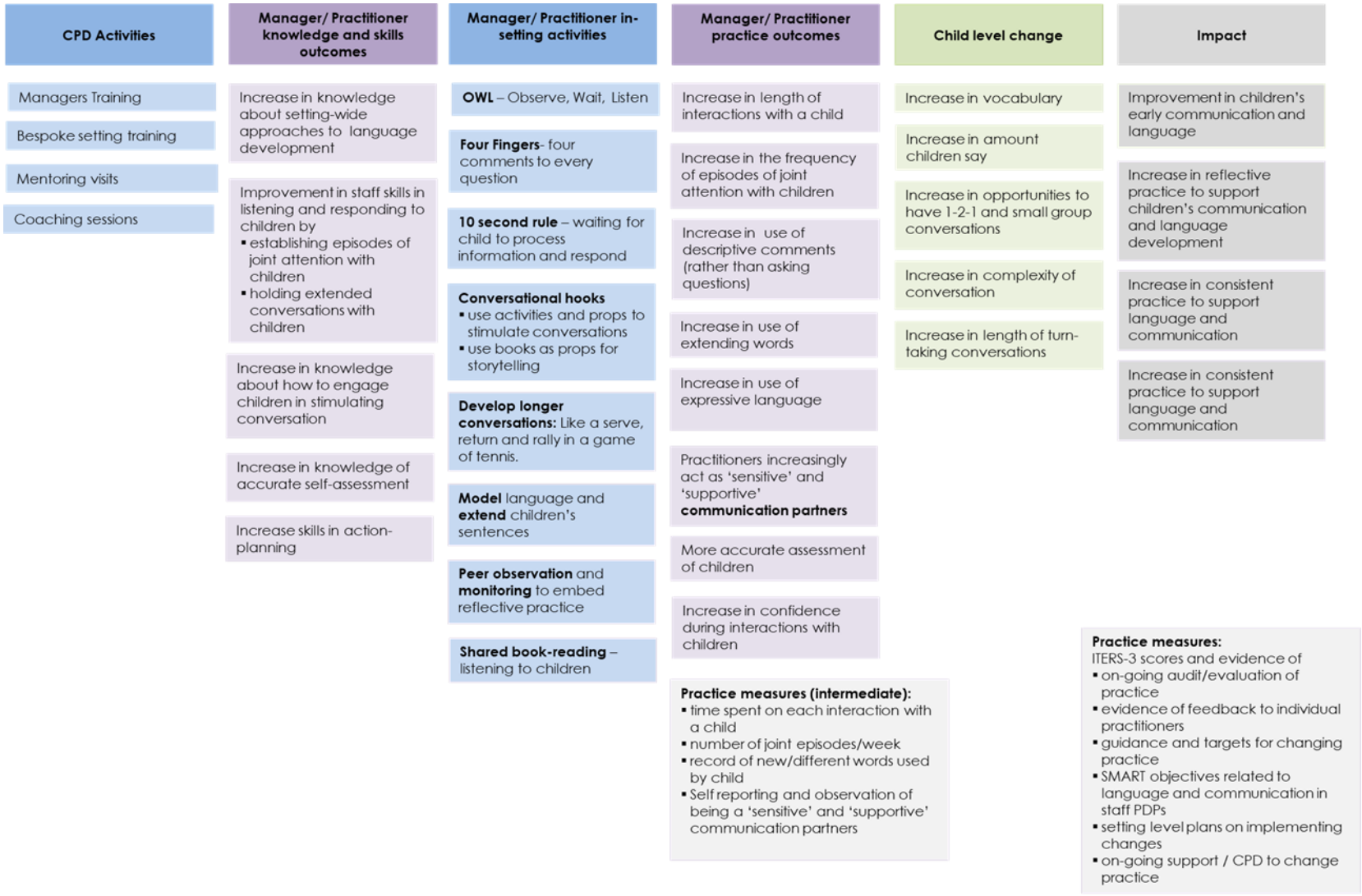
Interactive book reading				
Use books as props to start a conversation about the book	Increased use of descriptive comments	More encouragement of child to tell the story	Increased is shared storytelling	Story telling increasingly led by child
Invite child to tell the story	Increased in active listening			

Using songs and rhymes	Practitioner level change		Practitioner-child interaction
Props: (costumes, objects, photos)	Increase in use of songs and rhymes	Increase in modelling of word play	Increase in creative word interactions
Word play: create words for rhymes; leave out words	Increased personalisation of songs and rhymes		
Print referencing	Increased use of descriptive comments		Increase in time spent on talking about visuals
Use of illustrations/photos/posters for conversation	Increased in active listening		
Listening for sounds	Encourage children to listen for sounds		Increased association of sound with words
Use/make instruments	Increased engagement in activities that associate object with letter sounds		Increase in conversations that includes sound words

Appendix D Final MPT poste



Appendix E Final MPT logic model



Appendix F – Evaluation of the Manor Park Talk Pilot Research Instruments

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Coaching session observation template

Coach:
Date:
Time:
Setting (if not at Sheringham):

1. Attendee details – *Total number present, if any missing (from PVIs)*
2. Set up of session – *how the room was arranged, e.g. chairs in a circle or cabaret style. What resources the trainer brought with them, if there were any problems with set up.*
3. Topics covered – *what the trainer brings up*

4. Organisation of discussion – *inc. how well organised, and time spent on each topic, turn taking, small group discussion?*
5. Nature of discussion – *telling stories, sharing experiences, sharing documents, reading from materials*
6. Key issues discussed, and how to address them – *staff turnover, training, staff morale (what the managers bring up)*

7. **Materials referred to –** *conversational responsiveness audit tool, environment audit tool, MPT "record book"*
8. **Observer's assessment** – *What approaches / solutions discussed. Similarities / differences and general perceptions of discussion's usefulness. Anything else relevant you notice.*

Bespoke Training Observation

Upon arrival: ask trainers for 2 minutes at start of session to introduce the study and purpose of attending

- Introduce self
- NatCen are carrying out the independent evaluation of how Manor Park Talks is delivered during the pilot
- Observing today's training
- Happy to answer questions during breaks/lunch or after the training

Date of observation (DD/MM/YY)	
Time and duration of training session	

Location/name of nursery	
Observer	

1. Attendee details. *Record who was present – trainers, number of practitioners, and information about their level of experience and role, MPT developers (Sheringham staff)*

2. Structure of training. *Record how the session was structured, including timings. Comment on how well organised / structured the session was e.g. organised by each MPT strategy, running as intended, to time, time allowed for discussion, format of discussion, hand-outs and materials, repetitions from initial training*

3. Introduction to MPT. *Record how MPT as an intervention is introduced – its aims, relevance for nursery practice, for children, Newham. Note any questions asked in relation to aims and objectives. Was strategy document handed out? How was it introduced? Were coaching sessions mentioned?*

4. Content of MPT training.

Record

- *If/how MPT strategies are referred to and explained during the course of the training*
- *If specific techniques/practical examples are suggested for changing practice*
- *Questions asked and discussions about each training topic (and note if questions relate to SEND and/or EAL children)*

*If possible separate notes out by **each strategy and the techniques** covered in initial training (refer to crib sheet)*

5. Audit tool. *Record if audit tool introduced, (if at all) what was explained about its use and attendees impressions.*
6. Bespoke elements. *Note if anything covered in the training is specific to the nursery (pre- planned). Note whether trainers are responsive in making alternative suggestions based on attendees explanations of context*

7. **Overview of participant responses.** *Note any general 'grumblings' about MPT, nature of any discussion and main issues and concerns – during group discussions or conversations during breaks or lunch (note as formal/informal). Record understanding purpose of MPT, areas of confusion, techniques they say they like, indications of what they say they cannot change in practice.*

8. Trainer delivery of training. *Record impressions regarding accessibility – was the training pitched at the right level? Was plain English used? Record assessment of level of detail provided – too much, not enough? Record the extent to which trainers listened to participants' contributions, provided opportunities for participants to participate, and responded supportively and helpfully to participants' queries. Record any other impressions about trainers' communications skills and identify where more time, explanation and /or examples were needed).*
9. Any other observations.

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Manor Park Talks Evaluation

Topic guide

Autumn term – Interviews with managers

Aim of the interview:
The aims of the interviews with nursery managers in PVIs taking part in Manor Park Talks (MPT) during the Autumn term are to:

- Collect information on setting context
- Gather perceptions of launch event and bespoke training
- Explore early understanding of Manor Park Talks, and what it entails for practitioners' interactions with children
- Learn about how sites plan to deliver of Manor Park Talks and identify barriers and facilitators.

The topic guide:
This guide sets out a number of topics and questions that will be covered during interviews. The guide does not contain follow-up probes and questions like 'why', 'when', and 'how', etc., as participants' contributions will be explored in this way, as far as is feasible, during the 60 minute interview. Researchers will use prompts and probes in order to understand how and why views, behaviours and experiences have arisen. The interview will last no longer than **60 minutes.**

- To understand how Manor Park is delivered across the pilot nurseries
  - Identify changes needed to optimise Manor Park before it is rolled out across Newham
- Check they've read the research information sheet - any questions?
- Participation is voluntary.
- Data collected will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access and it will be deleted within 12 months of the end of the project.
- Your information will be used to produce a report for the EEF. We will not identify any nursery or staff member in the report.
- Anonymity and confidentiality: We will do our outmost to ensure that individuals are not identified. But only small number of nurseries is taking part so it may be that some of the information is identifiable. If you have any concerns about what you tell us during the interview, we are happy to discuss this at the end of the interview.
- We would like to record the interview – to have an accurate record of what is said.
- Any questions
-
-

-
- *Start recording and ask permission to start recording. If they don't agree to recording take hand written notes.*

1. Background

Aim: gather background information on the manager and their setting.

Role and background

- Current role
  - Overview of role and responsibilities in the nursery
  - How long in role and at nursery
  - Length (years) of experience working in early years
-
- Nursery staff
  - Number of staff
  - Level of experience of staff/level of qualifications
  - If staff are bilingual/multi lingual – use of different languages in nursery setting
  - **Language and development CPD undertaken in past year**
  - Key issues in staffing (turnover, CPD, maintaining practice)
  - If part of a chain – CPD responsibility – corporate or individual nursery
-
- About the children attending
  - **Number of children**
  - **Age range**
  - **Term-time/full year**
  - Part-time/full time children
  - Proportion of children in receipt of Free Early Education Entitlement at age 2 (FEEE2)
  - SEND; EAL

2. Taking part in MPT

Aim: find out why nursery is taking part and how the decision was made.

- Information provided by Sheringham
  - Impressions of MPT based on initial information
- Who was consulted
- Reasons for taking part
- Any initial concerns

3. Launch event

Aim: gather perceptions of the launch event. Specific strategies are covered in section 5. Remind participant of the launch event: all day training 18/09/18.

- Initial information received
- Any advance preparation required
- Usefulness for understanding what MPT is
  - Any concerns
- If they shared information with their staff afterwards
  - What they shared
  - Initial reactions of staff

4. Bespoke training

- *Aim: gather views on the bespoke training. Specific strategies will be discussed in section 5.*
  - Initial information received
  - Any advance preparation required
  - Was it as expected
  - Early impressions on usefulness for changing practice/delivering MPT
    - Any concerns
  - Whether there's a need to cascade training or have a follow-up meeting with staff
- ***If interview is a few days after Bespoke Training:***
  - Initial staff responses

5. MPT Strategies

Aim: to understand how nurseries are planning to deliver MPT. Give participant a copy of the MPT strategies document handed out at initial training. Use crib sheet (but do not give to participant).The strategies are:

1. **Conversational responsiveness**
2. **Interactive book reading**
3. **Using songs, rhymes and stories to support expressive language**
4. **Print referencing to support emergent literacy**
5. **Listening for sounds**

For each strategy ask the following

- Understanding of what needs to be done when interacting with children
  - What adults do
  - Environment
  - Expected of children
  - Anything that is unclear
- What aspects do they already use/do

- To deliver this aspect of MPT – expected change in practice
- **Planning to use any other specific techniques**
- **What will help/any barriers**

- **Delivery Challenges** *(this is a general question covering all strategies and techniques)*
  - Anything they will not deliver
  - Reasons for this

6. Supporting and checking MPT delivery

Aim: to find out how manager will support staff and any plans for using audit tool MPT.

Give copy of the audit tool to participant.

- What will staff need to deliver MPT (strategies) (e.g. time, resources - books, equipment)
- What addition CPD/training will staff need from them (i.e. that nursery may have to provide)
- Usefulness of the audit tool for checking MPT delivery
  - Plans to use audit tool
  - How/when/how often

7. Support needs

Aim: find out if manager thinks they will need more support from the MPT team.

- Further support needed
  - For what (remind of strategies and techniques)
  - Who in MPT team will they contact

8. Overview

- If a nursery manager came to you and said 'I want to deliver MPT', what would you tell them?
- Any final comments

TURN OFF RECORDER

- Ask if any concerns about what they have told us (if concerns, we can redact sections, share transcript for review).
- Thank participant and close.

Manor Park Talks Evaluation

Topic guide

Bespoke training – Interviews with trainers

Aim of the interview:
The aims of the interviews with the bespoke trainers delivering the bespoke training for Manor Park Talks (MPT) are to:

- Collect information on trainer experience in early years language and communication development and delivery of training
- Explore decisions around content design and adaptations of training for settings
- Gather trainers' perceptions of settings' understanding of Manor Park Talks and potential barriers to delivery
- Identify trainer's understanding of how Manor Park Talks will be implemented.

The topic guide:
This guide sets out a number of topics and questions that will be covered during interviews. The guide does not contain follow-up probes and questions like 'why', 'when', and 'how', etc., as participants' contributions will be explored in this way, as far as is feasible, during the 60 minute interview. Researchers will use prompts and probes in order to understand how and why views, behaviours and experiences have arisen. The interview will last no longer than **60 minutes.**

- Identify changes needed to optimise Manor Park before it is rolled out across Newham
- Participation is voluntary.
- Data collected will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access and it will be deleted within 12 months of the end of the project.
- Your information will be used to produce a report for the EEF. We will not identify the trainer in the report by name.
- Anonymity and confidentiality: We will do our outmost to ensure that individuals are not identified. But only two trainers carried out the bespoke training, so it may be that some of the information is identifiable. If you have any concerns about what you tell us during the interview, we are happy to discuss this at the end of the interview.
- We would like to record the interview – to have an accurate record of what is said.
- Any questions

Start recording and ask permission to start recording. If they don't agree to recording take hand written notes.

9. Background

Aim: gather background information on the trainer and how they became involved in MPT.

Background

Current role

- Background and experience of working in early years and delivery of training

Involvement in Manor Park Talks

- Overview of role for Manor Park Talks / length of involvement / nature of involvement
- Reasons for taking part

10. Designing the bespoke training

Aim: find out about the background and process for designing the bespoke training.

- Brief provided by Sheringham
  - Aims of the training
  - Recipients of training
  - What training should cover – and what was optional
  - Age group targeted at
  - Format and length – timings?
  - How brief was communicated and agreed – f2f, tel, email
- Design of training
  - Who was involved in designing training
  - Extent of collaboration between trainers
  - Sign off on content – responsibilities

11. Content of bespoke training

Aim: explore how content was designed and decision making around adaptations for each setting.

- Format and structure of training
  - Reasons for this
- Advance preparation required by settings
  - Trainer access to setting information
  - Usefulness for designing and delivering training
- Planned differences between settings
  - How adapted training for each setting
  - Types of adaptations planned
  - MPT strategies covered – why, who decided
- Unplanned differences between settings
  - Types of spontaneous changes
  - Reasons for changes
  - Any unintended differences experienced

12. MPT strategies

Aim: explore understanding of each strategy and how they were covered in the bespoke training.

For each strategy ask the following

- Understanding of the strategy
- Coverage of strategy during training

6. **Conversational responsiveness**
7. **Interactive book reading**
8. **Using songs, rhymes and stories to support expressive language**
9. **Print referencing to support emergent literacy**
10. **Listening for sounds**

13. Perceptions of the settings

Aim: gather trainer impressions of attendees and potential barriers to delivery of the MPT strategies for settings.

- Impressions of attendees
  - Levels of engagement
  - Understanding of what is required to deliver MPT
- Barriers to settings delivering strategies/techniques
- Further training needs identified – general and MPT

14. Overview of MPT

Aim: explore perceptions of MPT and expectations of MPT delivery.

- Understanding of MPT
- Expectations of MPT delivery by settings
  - Time spent on each activity per week
  - Use of audit tools
  - Use of environment tool
- What should change – if anything

TURN OFF RECORDER

- Ask if any concerns about what they have told us (if concerns, we can redact sections, share transcript for review).
- Thank participant and close.

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Manor Park Talks Pilot Evaluation

Topic guide

Spring term – Interviews with managers

Aim of the interview:
The aims of the interviews with nursery managers in PVIs taking part in Manor Park Talks (MPT) during the Spring term are to:

- Collect information on staffing changes in the setting
- Explore how managers are delivering Manor Park Talks (MPT)
- Gather perceptions on support provided for managers as part of MPT, including coaching sessions
- Learn about how managers are monitoring MPT delivery

The topic guide:
This guide sets out a number of topics and questions that will be covered during interviews. The guide does not contain follow-up probes and questions like 'why', 'when', and 'how', etc., as participants' contributions will be explored in this way, as far as is feasible, during the 60 minute interview. Researchers will use prompts and probes in order to understand how and why views, behaviours and experiences have arisen. The interview will last no longer than **60 minutes.**

ws

- Identify changes needed to optimise Manor Park Talks before it is rolled out across Newham

- Participation is voluntary.
- Data collected will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access and it will be deleted within 12 months of the end of the project.
- Your information will be used to produce a report for the EEF. We will not identify any nursery or staff member in the report.
- Anonymity and confidentiality: We will do our outmost to ensure that individuals are not identified. But only small number of nurseries is taking part so it may be that some of the information is identifiable. If you have any concerns about what you tell us during the interview, we are happy to discuss this at the end of the interview.
- We would like to record the interview – to have an accurate record of what is said.
- Any questions

Start recording and ask permission to start recording. If they don't agree to recording take hand written notes.

15. Setting and staff

Aim: gather information on staffing changes within the setting and implications for MPT
Staffing

- Any changes since Autumn interview
- Staffing gaps
- Ease of cascading training to any new staff

16. Delivery

Aim: Explore how MPT is being delivered at this setting
Planning

- MPT planning – all staff meetings/individual meetings
- How is MPT scheduled in?
- Any existing activities dropped?
- (Thinking of last meeting) - MPT features discussed in meetings – nature of discussion and what is planned

Delivery

- Aspects of MPT being delivered – how much /how often (use poster provided to nurseries if needed)
    - OWL
    - Four comments to one question rule (four fingers to one thumb)
    - Waiting ten seconds for a response

Prioritisation of MPT techniques

- Reasons for prioritising
- Communication with Sheringham Nursery on priorities
- Techniques that are a challenge to deliver/undeliverable

Overall delivery

- Consistency of delivery
- Views on flexibility
- Key challenges, solutions

17. Support

Aim: gather information on the coaching sessions and how they affected practice at the setting
Coaching sessions

- Usefulness: learning? Solutions focused?
- Any communications with staff afterwards
- Any changes in practice based on learning from coaching session

Other support

- Any other support sought?
- From whom?
- Issues covered/any actions taken/solutions implemented

18. Monitoring

- How delivery is being monitored? (Observations formal/informal, target setting, progress meetings, team meetings)
- What is being monitored?
- Techniques, amount of each technique, consistency across staff, individual targets

Audit tool

- Usefulness
- How it's being used – frequency, feedback to staff

19. Perceived benefits

- Improving manager and staff practice
- Children's progress

20. Overall summary

- Views on delivery and clarity – is anything confusing or unclear?
- Key challenges

TURN OFF RECORDER

- Ask if any concerns about what they have told us (if concerns, we can redact sections, share transcript for review).
- Thank participant and close.

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Manor Park Talks Pilot Evaluation
Topic guide

Spring term – Interviews with staff

Aim of the interview:
The aims of the interviews with nursery managers in PVIs taking part in Manor Park Talks (MPT) during the Spring term are to:

- Collect information on staff background
- Explore how staff are delivering MPT
- Learn about barriers or facilitators to Manor Park Talks delivery

The topic guide:
This guide sets out a number of topics and questions that will be covered during interviews. The guide does not contain follow-up probes and questions like 'why', 'when', and 'how', etc., as participants' contributions will be explored in this way, as far as is feasible, during the 60 minute interview. Researchers will use prompts and probes in order to understand how and why views, behaviours and experiences have arisen. The interview will last no longer than **60 minutes.**

- To understand how Manor Park is delivered across the pilot nurseries, including the views of both managers and staff in case study nurseries
- Identify changes needed to optimise Manor Park Talks before it is rolled out across Newham

- Participation is voluntary.
- Data collected will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access and it will be deleted within 12 months of the end of the project.
- Your information will be used to produce a report for the EEF. We will not identify any nursery or staff member in the report.
- Anonymity and confidentiality: We will do our outmost to ensure that individuals are not identified. But only small number of nurseries is taking part so it may be that some of the information is identifiable. If you have any concerns about what you tell us during the interview, we are happy to discuss this at the end of the interview.
- We would like to record the interview – to have an accurate record of what is said.
- Any questions

Start recording and ask permission to start recording. If they don't agree to recording take hand written notes.

21. Background

Aim: gather background information on staff member, experience and length of time at setting
Role and background

Current role

- Overview of role and responsibilities in the nursery
- How long in role and at nursery

Experience

- Length (years) of experience working in early years
- Level of qualification
- If bilingual
- Training on language and communication development in the past year, other than Manor Park Talks

22. Delivery

Aim: Explore how staff are delivering MPT.

Planning

- How they plan MPT techniques: daily, weekly, monthly
- Discussions with manager: all staff/individually
- Discussions with other staff

Delivery

- Aspects of MPT being delivered – how much /how often (use poster provided to nurseries if needed)
    - OWL
    - Four comments to one question rule (four fingers to one thumb)
    - Waiting ten seconds for a response

- Discussion of MPT with parents (if any)
    - Type of parental involvement, parent's views on MPT
    - Queries from parents about bilingualism?

Prioritisation of MPT techniques

- In past few months – what was prioritised (if anything)
- Looking ahead – what will be prioritised (if anything)
- Techniques that are a challenge to deliver/undeliverable

Implications of MPT

- Changes to other activities
- Stopped or reduced any activities - which ones, views on this
- Challenges to all staff doing the same (consistency)
- Which techniques have been changed?

23. Monitoring

How is MPT delivery monitored:

- Targets for individual staff

- Discussions with manager – team/individually
- Observation of practice
- Use of Audit tool – team/individually
  - Usefulness
- Feedback received
- Challenges discussed and addressed? Examples and how addressed?

24. Support

If have questions or need support:

- Manager – what issues, how handled? Usefulness
- Other staff – example issues, solutions? Usefulness
- Discussion of coaching session? What discussed? Helpful for MPT?
- Any support needs not met?

25. Perceived benefits

- For own practice
- Children's progress

26. Overall summary

- Views on delivery and clarity of MPT – is anything confusing or unclear?
- Key challenges

TURN OFF RECORDER

- Ask if any concerns about what they have told us (if concerns, we can redact sections, share transcript for review).
- Thank participant and close.

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Manor Park Talks Pilot Evaluation
Topic guide

Summer term – Interviews with managers

Aim of the interview:
The aims of the interviews with nursery managers in PVIs taking part in Manor Park Talks (MPT) during the Spring term are to:

- Collect information on staffing changes in the setting
- Explore reflections of managers on overall delivery of MPT
- Gather perceptions on support provided for managers as part of MPT, including coaching sessions and initial training
- Understand how implementation was monitored in settings and changes over time
- Overall views of managers on MPT

1.9 Introduction

- Recap: introduce self and NatCen Social Research, conducting the evaluation for EEF.
- Overall project objectives:
  - To understand how Manor Park Talks is delivered across the pilot nurseries, including the views of both managers and staff in case study nurseries
  - Identify changes needed to optimise Manor Park Talks before it is rolled out across Newham
- Some questions might feel repetitive – this time we're really interested in finding out your overall perspectives on MPT and how these have changed over time.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Data collected will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access and it will be deleted within 12 months of the end of the project.
- Your information will be used to produce a report for the EEF. We will not identify any nursery or staff member in the report.
- Anonymity and confidentiality: We will do our outmost to ensure that individuals are not identified. But only small number of nurseries is taking part so it may be that some of the information is identifiable. If you have any concerns about what you tell us during the interview, we are happy to discuss this at the end of the interview.
- We would like to record the interview – to have an accurate record of what is said.
- Any questions
-

Start recording and ask permission to start recording. If they don't agree to recording take hand written notes.

27. Setting and staff

Aim: gather information on staffing changes within the setting and implications for MPT
Staffing

- Any changes since Spring interview
- Staffing gaps
- Any changes to cascading training to new staff

28. Delivery

Aim: Reflections on delivery of MPT
Planning

- Changes in planning in general since October
- Changes in planning for MPT
- MPT planning – what works, what worked less well, if anything
- MPT planning – additional time required specifically for MPT, if any

Delivery

- Aspects of MPT being delivered at the moment – how much /how often (use poster provided to nurseries if needed)
    - OWL
    - Four comments to one question rule (four fingers to one thumb)
    - Waiting ten seconds for a response
- Changes in delivery of MPT aspects over time
    - If changed, how
    - More or less of any aspects of MPT
- Straightforward aspects of MPT to implement
- Difficult aspects of MPT to implement, solutions
- Most useful for delivery of MPT – for managers, for staff, for children
- Less useful for delivery of MPT – for managers, for staff, for children

Prioritisation of MPT techniques

- Any changes to prioritisation of MPT techniques since the launch of MPT
- Reasons for changes to prioritisation

29. Support

Aim: gather perceptions of the coaching sessions and overall usefulness for implementation of MPT

Coaching sessions

- Level of attendance
    - Any barriers to attending
    - Any motivations for attending
- Overall usefulness
    - For MPT in particular and general practice
- How was learning from coaching session implemented, if at all

Initial training

- Reflections on usefulness of training
    - More/less of any parts of the training
- Any training gaps

Other support

- Any further support sought since last spoke in February, from whom?
- Issues covered/any actions taken/solutions implemented
- Any needs for support with MPT that weren't met?

30. Monitoring

- Changes to monitoring of delivery over time
- What worked, what worked less well
- Tools used for monitoring progress and usefulness – audit tool, any other tools
- Any additional time required specifically for MPT

31. Perceived benefits

- Improving manager and staff practice since MPT began - changes
- Children's progress – examples of changes
- For parents
- Any other benefits

32. Overall summary

- What advice would you give to another manager who is delivering MPT?
- Differences between MPT and other language & communication training
- Plans for MPT over the next few months
- Any other key challenges

TURN OFF RECORDER

- Ask if any concerns about what they have told us (if concerns, we can redact sections, share transcript for review).
- Thank participant and close.

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Manor Park Talks Pilot Evaluation
Topic guide

Summer term – Interviews with staff

Aim of the interview:
The aims of the interviews with nursery managers in PVIs taking part in Manor Park Talks (MPT) during the Spring term are to:

- Explore staff experiences of delivery of MPT overall
- Learn about barriers or facilitators to Manor Park Talks delivery
- Understand staff perceptions on level of support and training provided

The topic guide:
This guide sets out a number of topics and questions that will be covered during interviews. The guide does not contain follow-up probes and questions like 'why', 'when', and 'how', etc., as participants' contributions will be explored in this way, as far as is feasible, during the 60 minute interview. Researchers will use prompts and probes in order to understand how and why views, behaviours and experiences have arisen. The interview will last no longer than **60 minutes.**

  - To understand how Manor Park is delivered across the pilot nurseries, including the views of both managers and staff in case study nurseries
  - Identify changes needed to optimise Manor Park Talks before it is rolled out across Newham
- Some questions might feel repetitive – this time we're really interested in finding out your overall perspectives on MPT and how these have changed over time.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Data collected will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access and it will be deleted within 12 months of the end of the project.
- Your information will be used to produce a report for the EEF. We will not identify any nursery or staff member in the report.
- Anonymity and confidentiality: We will do our outmost to ensure that individuals are not identified. But only small number of nurseries is taking part so it may be that some of the information is identifiable. If you have any concerns about what you tell us during the interview, we are happy to discuss this at the end of the interview.
- We would like to record the interview – to have an accurate record of what is said.
- Any questions

Start recording and ask permission to start recording. If they don't agree to recording take hand written notes.

33. Background

Aim: gather background information on staff member, experience and length of time at setting
Role and background *(only if new staff member not interviewed in Spring term)*

Current role

- Overview of role and responsibilities in the nursery
- How long in role and at nursery

Experience

- Length (years) of experience working in early years
- Level of qualification
- If bilingual
- Training on language and communication development in the past year, other than Manor Park Talks

If same staff member as spoke to previously:

- Any changes to your role since February

34. Delivery

Aim: Explore how staff are delivering MPT.
Planning

- Changes to planning of MPT techniques since the launch in October
- Planning for MPT - what works well, what works less well for staff in relation to planning

Delivery

- Aspects of MPT being delivered – how much /how often (use poster provided to nurseries if needed)
    - OWL
    - Four comments to one question rule (four fingers to one thumb)
    - Waiting ten seconds for a response
- Changes in delivery of MPT techniques over time for staff member
    - If changed, how
    - More or less of any techiques of MPT
- Straightforward techniques of MPT to implement
- Difficult aspects of MPT to implement, solutions
- Most useful for delivery of MPT – for them, for children
- Less useful for delivery of MPT – for them, for children

Parental involvement

- Discussion of MPT with parents (if any)
    - Type of parental involvement, parent's views on MPT
    - Any changes over time in parental involvement in MPT

Prioritisation of MPT techniques

- In past few months – what was prioritised (if anything) and reasons for this
- Techniques that overall have been a challenge to deliver/undeliverable

Implications of MPT

- Changes to other activities due to MPT
- Stopped or reduced any activities - which ones, views on this
- Overall changes to staff member's practice

35. Monitoring

How has MPT delivery been monitored:

- Targets for individual staff – if so, have they changed over time?
- Approaches to monitoring MPT delivery in setting e.g. observations
    - Usefulness
- Use of Audit tool – team/individually
    - Usefulness
- Feedback received
    - Actions taken, if any
- Challenges discussed and addressed? Examples and how addressed?

36. Support

If have questions or need support:

- Manager – what issues, how handled overall? Usefulness, changes over time

- Other staff – example issues, solutions? Usefulness, changes over time
- Discussion of coaching session? What discussed? Helpful for MPT? Changes over time
- Initial training – what was useful / less useful?
- Any support needs not met?

37. Perceived benefits

- For own practice – examples of changes
- Children's progress – changes in behaviour

38. Overall summary

- What advice would you give to another practitioner who is new to delivering MPT?
- Differences between MPT and other language & communication training
- Key challenges

TURN OFF RECORDER

- Ask if any concerns about what they have told us (if concerns, we can redact sections, share transcript for review).
- Thank participant and close.

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