A fidelity and implementation study of the Eager and Able to Learn programme

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Statement on Ethics

The research was conducted following the British Educational Research Association's Code of Ethics and each phase of the research was granted ethical approval by the Queen's University School of Education Ethics Committee.

1 The EAL Programme

This report presents the findings of the fidelity and implementation study conducted into the delivery of the Eager and Able to Learn programme (hereafter the EAL programme) in 28 early years settings from September 2009 to June 2010.

This initial chapter provides background information on the development of the EAL Programme and details the various elements of the programme and its anticipated outcomes.

Background

The EAL programme is a service designed by Early Years and targeted at two-year-old children. It aims to improve young children's eagerness and ability to learn through enhancing their physical, social, emotional and linguistic development. The programme places a particular emphasis on physical movement, the physical design of early childhood programme settings, the practitioner/child relationship, the parent/child relationship and the partnership between the parent and the practitioner in support of the young children's development, Early Years theory of change and that movement provides a more natural context for children of this age to develop. The programme has a group-based element, which involves a series of developmental movement and play activities, and a home based element, which encourages parents to explore play activities with their children in the home environment.

Between September 2008 and June 2009, the EAL programme was piloted in 14 settings with two-year-olds across Northern Ireland comprising private day-care nurseries and Sure Start programmes. Drawing on the learning from this pilot a number of changes were made to the service design.

Following the pilot year, between September 2009 and June 2010, the programme was rolled out in a further 28 early years settings - 18 day care nurseries which were a mix of private businesses and social economy settings and 10 Sure Start programmes. Sure Start programmes and day care providers differ in several ways, namely:

- Sure Start programmes for two year olds generally operate for 2.5 hours per day, four or five days per week with a play and stay session for parents over the course of an academic year. Day care settings generally operate for a full day, five days per week all year round.
- Sure Start programmes operate a range of parental engagement activities such as home visiting whereas this would not be common practice in day care settings.
- Sure Start settings are located in areas of high deprivation, though the service is a universal one, open to all who live in the area.
- Sure Start programmes have a static group of children for an entire academic year whereas in day care settings some children move from the two year old room during the year.

A research team comprising representatives from NCB NI (National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland), Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University College was employed to evaluate the EAL programme using a variety of methods:

- A fidelity and implementation study to measure fidelity to the service design and examine the processes underpinning the programme's delivery.

- An experimental cross-over design study[1] to measure the programme's impact on target outcomes.

This report concerns the findings from the fidelity and implementation study conducted across all 28 settings that delivered the programme in 2009/10.

EAL programme components

This section gives a brief overview of the EAL programme's six core components:

- Initial practitioner training
- Cluster training for practitioners
- Early Years Specialist (SEYS) support
- The Service Design Manual for staff which included developmental movement experiences
- A set of resources for the group environment
- Home learning package for parents which included play resources and a home learning manual

Initial practitioner training

The initial training programme is a 42 hour training programme and aims to enable practitioners to understand the theory and rationale behind the programme and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to begin delivering it in settings.

Day 1: The image of the 2 year old child
How children learn
Introduction to the service design

Day 2: The physical environment as a support to young children's learning and development

Day 3: Group settings – developmental movement experiences

Day 4: Home learning – developmental play strategies

Day 5: Positive interactions as a support to young children's learning and development

Day 6: Parents and practitioners working together to support young children's learning and development

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[1] In Year One from September 2008 to June 2009, the settings continued with their usual programme of activities and the cohort of 2-3 year olds attending settings during that year acted as a control group. In Year Two, from September 2009 to June 2010, the same settings introduced the EAL programme and the next cohort of 2-3 year olds who attended those settings during that year acted as the intervention group. The study therefore used a cross-over design, with each setting acting as its own control. These reports are: McGuinness, C., Connolly, P., Eakin, A. and Miller. S. (2012) The Developmental Status of 2-3 Year Old Children entering Group-Based Settings in Northern Ireland: Survey Findings, Belfast: Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast. Available at http://www.qub.ac.uk/cee/ and McGuinness, C., Eakin, A. and Connolly, P. (2012) An Evaluation of the Effects of the Eager and Able to Learn Programme on Outcomes for 2-3 Year Olds, Belfast: Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast. Available at http://www.qub.ac.uk/cee/

Cluster training for practitioners

The cluster training sessions take place bi-monthly and include 4 x 3 hr sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to expand on the initial six days training and to address any difficulties that practitioners experience with the implementation of the programme. The focus of the cluster training was as follows over the first year of implementation:

Session 1: The physical environment and cross-lateral development
Session 2: Observations and vestibular development
Session 3: Planning and proprioceptive development
Session 4: Working in partnership with parents and the way forward

SEYS support

Early Years recognised the need to provide ongoing external mentoring, modelling and support to early childhood services for many years. The role of the Early Years Specialist (SEYS) has evolved over a period of 20 years and was formally recognised by the Department of Education as part of the Pre-School Expansion Programme launched in 1998. The SEYS is educated to at least degree level, with extensive experience in supporting leadership, management, curriculum planning and implementation. All of the support given to settings is framed by a community development approach.

In order to provide this type of intensive support, the SEYS works with each setting for at least five hours per month which includes one to one mentoring, modelling and peer support training. Each SEYS supports approximately 18 to 20 early years' settings.

The support of the SEYS is fundamental to the successful implementation of the service design and is an essential component required to ensure the fidelity of any programme. In order to support the development of quality programmes a key role of the SEYS is to build good relationships and act as a catalyst for change and improvement within early years settings.

The SEYS brings high levels of expertise encouraging practitioners, children, parents and communities to explore different perspectives and reflect on their experiences and practices. All SEYS attend monthly practice support forums where they engage in continuous professional development. They avail of study visits to observe best practice locally and globally, synthesise key messages and translate them for use within an Irish context.

The service design manual

Practitioners in each setting are provided with a service design manual to support implementation of the programme.

The service design manual provides the theoretical background to the EAL programme, details of its various elements and the role of each of the stakeholders involved. The manual contains information for practitioners on the aim and purpose of the home visits.

The developmental movement experiences

The service design details the 12 developmental movement experiences – each targeting one of three areas of children's sensory motor development:

Cross-lateral development
- This way, that a-way
- Creepy crawly
- Climbing and clambering
- I Love Shoes

Vestibular development
- Stepping stones
- Row, row, row your boat
- Rolling
- Sliding

Proprioceptive development
- Catch me if you can
- Pinch, poke, pull
- The builder's yard
- Stop and start

The resource packs

Term One
Platforms and mat
Tunnel
Duvet
Chalk and tape

Term two
Tubular cushions
Body ball
Slide
Vinyl Spots (set of 6)

Term three
Fine Scarves (set of 6)
Balzac Balloon
Balls (set of 3)
Bubbles
Clay
Wheelbarrow

Text book – Design for Living and Learning

Each setting is provided with resource packs as detailed above to support the delivery of movement experiences where required. It is expected that each movement experience be implemented at least

daily for at least two weeks and during that time appropriate resources should be made accessible to children.

Prior to implementing the movement experiences, each setting is required to establish a Developmental Movement Area (DMA) both inside and outdoors. This entails rearranging the layout of indoor space to promote physical activity and sensory development. The aim of the DMA is to provide a space for safe challenges for young children in terms of physical movement and sensory motor development.

Home learning package and parental resources

There are a number of home based elements to the programme, each of which are designed to reinforce the learning that is taking place in settings and to support parents in helping their children's development. The home learning package consists of:

- One 2.5 hour parent workshop facilitated by a SEYS where the programme's aims, objectives and structure are explained.
- A home learning manual for parents which documents the programme's purpose and expected outcomes and outlines a range of developmental play activities that parents should undertake with their children at home.
- A resource pack for parents and children to use when carrying out the play activities which contained the following:
  A Home Learning Manual
  Bowls
  Jug
  Wooden spoons
  Paper (assorted colours)
  Crayons
  Chalk
  Length of fabric
  Packet of flour
  Packet of pasta

  Cards: Row, row, row your boat
           This-a-way, that-a-way
           Dough recipes

  Drawstring bag to hold all the contents

- Three home visits from practitioners at regular intervals throughout the year where it is expected that practitioners reinforce the importance of the EAL programme, its aims and objectives and work with parents to develop their confidence in engaging children in the play activities.

Programme outcomes

The programme is aimed at improving the following outcomes:

Child outcomes

- Improved social / emotional skills and behaviours: increased independence and self help skills
- Improved language and communication skills: increased vocabulary and increased ability to use vocabulary in context
- Improved ability to think and solve problems
- Improved levels of involvement: increased levels of concentration, persistence and precision
- Improved levels of developmental movement: improved sensory motor development

Practitioner outcomes

- Increased recognition of the importance of play, in the development of two-year-old children; and increased frequency in providing different types of play opportunities, both indoors and outdoors
- Increased responsiveness in practitioners' interactions and engagement with two-year-old's children in order to support their communication, social, emotional, physical and cognitive development needs
- Increased recognition of the importance of movement for two-year-old development and how it can be linked to wider developmental goals (e.g. language, cognitive, social-emotional, as well as motor development)
- Increased recognition of the importance of working in partnership with parents around the developmental needs of two-year-old children and increased opportunities to communicate with parents

Parent outcomes

- Increased recognition of the importance of play in the development of their two-year-old children; and increased frequency in providing low cost/no cost play opportunities, both indoors and outdoors
- Increased responsiveness in parents' interactions and engagement with two-year-old children in order to support their communication, social, emotional, physical and cognitive development needs
- Increased recognition of the importance of movement for two-year-old development and how it can be related to wider developmental goals (e.g. language, cognitive, social-emotional, as well as motor development)
- Increased recognition of the importance of working in partnership with practitioners to meet the developmental needs of their two-year-old children, increased opportunities to communicate with practitioners

The fidelity and implementation study

The lack of fidelity implementation monitoring across the Atlantic Philanthropies Disadvantaged Children and Youth (DCY) funded programmes was highlighted by Dynarski and colleagues in 2009:

> Focus on documenting implementation and fidelity to models and service manuals is critical to ensuring that the evaluation is a good test of a properly implemented intervention. Moreover, much can be learned about how to implement these interventions in the Irish context; it is important to make the most of what can be learned from grantees' experiences to support future replication.
> (Dynarski et al, 2009:31)

Comprehensive evaluation of an intervention programme, therefore, requires an assessment of the extent to which the programme has been delivered to fidelity. The effectiveness of a programme or intervention needs to be measured, not only in terms of its outcomes and outputs but also in the context of *how* it was implemented. This is particularly important if it is intended that the programme be developed further and rolled out to wider numbers of participants in various locations.

The aim of the fidelity implementation study was to measure fidelity of implementation and to explore stakeholder experiences and processes of implementation.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter two details the findings from a literature review conducted to explore existing evidence on methods of measuring fidelity of intervention implementation;
- Chapter three outlines the research methods used in the study;
- Chapter four presents the findings in relation to fidelity measurement and explores what moderated levels of fidelity;
- Chapter five details the study findings regarding stakeholder experiences and processes of implementation and
- Chapter six presents the conclusions and makes recommendations on how the process of implementation can be improved.

A separate appendix document to this report contains the research instruments, scoring systems and data tables used in this study.

2 Measuring fidelity – a literature review

This chapter summarises the findings from a literature review which was conducted at the outset of this study and which explored existing evidence on the measurement of fidelity in the implementation of social and educational interventions. The purpose of the review was to inform the development of a system for measuring fidelity to the EAL programme.

The chapter begins by discussing the literature findings regarding the development of fidelity measurement, outlining some of the main theories and ideas that have been established in the field. The chapter continues by detailing the fidelity measurement approach chosen to underpin this present study, illustrating how it relates to the EAL programme's design and evaluation.

The development of fidelity measurement

Fidelity means being faithful to the original design of an intervention both in terms of the detail of its components and the spirit or manner in which it was conceived (Holliday et al, 2009; O'Connor et al, 2007).

Just as there is now an increased emphasis on evidence based practice to inform policy, the issue of implementation fidelity has been gaining momentum in recent years. Several commentators (e.g. Holliday et al, 2009; Carroll et al, 2007; Eames et al, 2009; Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008; McBride et al, 2002) have noted its importance. The failure of evidence based initiatives to achieve expected outcomes has been blamed on lack of fidelity (Hutchings et al, 2007, Carroll et al, 2007). However, even where interventions do achieve their expected results there is now growing recognition that such programmes need to be validated in terms of fidelity (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). Furthermore, several studies have shown that the level of implementation fidelity has a significant impact on outcomes, with effect sizes being 2-3 times higher in interventions that achieve high levels of fidelity than those with lower fidelity levels (ibid).

Initially implementation fidelity tended to be measured by the extent to which the content of a programme was delivered. However, more recent concepts of implementation fidelity have used a more holistic approach, with a growing recognition of the following:

- The need to take cognisance of the context within which interventions are delivered (Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008);
- How the intervention is delivered – i.e. quality (Eames et al, 2009; Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008; Sylva et al, 2006 and Justice et al 2007) and
- Using 'a triangulation of measures' (McBride et al, 2002), especially if an intervention is delivered across several sites.

Elements of implementation fidelity

There are several schools of thought in relation to how many elements are involved in implementation fidelity. For example, Mihalic et al (2002, cited in Hutchings et al, 2007) have described implementation fidelity has having five components whilst Bumbarger and Perkins (2008) have identified seven. What there does appear to be agreement on is that a range of factors need to be considered when considering how best to measure fidelity (McBride et al, 2002; Holliday et al, 2009).

These factors include the need not only to ascertain *what* was delivered but *how* the intervention was delivered. There is, therefore, a need to use a range of measures, both quantitative and qualitative. There is also a need to identify as many confounding components as possible during the pilot phase of a programme such as training issues, motivation of those implementing the programme, experience and expertise of practitioners, characteristics of the those receiving the intervention and the setting and competition for resources in the setting (McBride et al 2002).

Carroll and his colleagues (2007) advocate for a further two components - intervention complexity and facilitation strategies. They also attempt to explain the relationship between the different components of implementation fidelity. They propose that adherence (which includes content, coverage, frequency and duration of the intervention) is moderated by intervention complexity, facilitation strategies, the quality of delivery and participant responsiveness. Durlak and DuPre's (2008) 'ecological framework' echoes Carroll et al as it too focuses on the relationship between the capacity of an organisation to deliver the intervention and the support provided to those delivering the intervention to achieve effective implementation. For Durlak and DuPre the capacity of the organisation, training and technical support is central to successful implementation.

Fidelity versus adaptation

Several commentators (e.g. O'Connor et al, 2007; Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008; Carroll et al, 2007; Eames et al, 2009; Durlak and DuPre, 2008) indicate that absolute implementation fidelity is quite difficult to achieve. This is especially so in 'real world' situations, as opposed to experimental settings and particularly where the intervention is being delivered by a variety of staff who have differing skill levels, different amounts of time available and possibly differing resources available during programme delivery.

Often fidelity and adaptation are seen as mutually exclusive with some claiming that any adaptation is equivalent to a lack of fidelity (Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008). An alternative view is that a certain amount of adaptation may be necessary in order to make a programme 'fit' the needs of some communities (Backer, 2001 cited in Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008; O'Connor et al, 2007). However, what cannot be deemed acceptable are 'changes to the content, duration or delivery style of the programme as these kinds of changes may undermine the effects of the programme' (O Connor et al, 2007:2).

Another view is put forward by Greenberg et al (2005) who claim that there can be 'adaptation with fidelity' (cited in Bumbarger and Perkins (2008:58). This approach however, raises the issue of how much adaptation can be tolerated and the need to identify the absolutely critical elements of an intervention. Carroll et al have perhaps identified the answer to this dilemma; they claim that once the essential elements of an intervention have been identified, the scope for adaptation to local conditions or circumstances will become clear (Carroll et al, 2007). For Carroll and his colleagues once all the essential elements are included, the programme can be said to attain fidelity. However,

omitting any of the essential elements as a result of adaptation will compromise the level of fidelity achieved (ibid).

According to others, if those implementing the initiative do decide to modify the programme there should be full consultation with the person or organisation that developed the programme (Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008).

Drivers of fidelity

The literature has identified a number of key areas that have a positive influence on implementation fidelity. These include the:

- Existence of supportive mechanisms
- Involvement of stakeholders
- Motivation of practitioners

Existence of supportive mechanisms

The role of support mechanisms in contributing to implementation fidelity has been highlighted by several commentators. These mechanisms can include training, monitoring, providing feedback and emotional support to practitioners, using manuals and checklists as well as qualitative records to facilitate reflection on practice and skills development.

Some commentators (e.g. Carroll et al, 2007 and Eames et al, 2009) claim that supporting implementation through a range of such measures will increase the likelihood of greater fidelity being achieved. Several commentators specifically highlight the important role that training plays in supporting implementation (Fixsen et al, 2005, cited in 2005 Bumbarger and Perkins 2008; Durlak and DuPre, 2008; Justice et al, 2007; McBride et al, 2002).

Whilst some studies (e.g. Justice et al, 2007) found that minimal initial training was sufficient in order to attain high implementation fidelity of programmes, other studies such as those of Fixsen and colleagues (2005) found that initial training also needs to be supplemented with continuous advice and support (cited in Bumbarger and Perkins 2008). This is thought to be particularly important if practitioners are to overcome barriers to implementation (ibid).

Several problematic issues have been identified in relation to initial training. Initial training often takes place several months before the commencement of an intervention. The time lag can mean that practitioner's skills and knowledge can be diluted or indeed lost altogether. In addition it may be the case that the timing of the training means that not all practitioners have been identified by settings and therefore not everyone involved in implementing the intervention participates in the initial training. Their understanding, therefore, of the programme, its aim and objectives and their role in it, is likely to be diminished which can in turn affect the quality of delivery (Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008).

Involvement of stakeholders

Several commentators have stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders at all stages of programme development and implementation, i.e. from the initial discussions on the design and selection of programmes to the planning, delivery and evaluation of them (e.g. Durlak and DuPre, 2008).

It is deemed particularly important to involve staff members who are required to implement the programme as they need to be given time to fully understand the programme, its benefits, its delivery mechanisms and its materials. Staff involvement at an early stage is even more crucial if the intervention is being delivered by several staff or at several sites. Lack of commitment from any staff (those implementing or those supporting or managing implementers) in any location will seriously undermine the initiative and compromise its effectiveness (O'Connor et al, 2007: Durlak and DuPre, 2008). In terms of practice, McBride and colleagues (2002) emphasise the need to undertake a range of tasks with those implementing the programme including clarifying roles, responsibilities and tasks and harnessing the active involvement of practitioners. Ensuring that the benefits of implementing a programme outweigh any perceived costs to the practitioners is also crucial. Benefits can include tailor made feedback and advice or financial incentives e.g. for relief staff.

Programmes that are targeted towards children and young people also need the 'buy-in' of parents if they are to achieve the goals of the intervention. Hutchings et al stress the need for organisations delivering interventions to work in collaboration with parents, respecting their values and beliefs (Hutchings et al, 2007).

Motivation of practitioners

Another issue which has drawn the attention of a number of writers has been the motivation of those involved in delivering the programme. It is not enough for practitioners to merely deliver the content of a programme, they must do so with conviction and be motivated to engage fully with the participants. The delivery style of practitioners is therefore crucial. McBride et al found that there was a greater commitment to implementing the programme as it was designed when teachers' motivation levels and their perceptions of students' motivation levels were high (McBride et al, 2002) while Kam et al (2003) and Durlak and DuPre (2008) also advocate for the importance of motivation at leadership level e.g. head teachers in schools.

Durlak and DuPre (2008) also point out that motivation is necessary at the level of an entire organisation, not just the individuals within it: new interventions tend to be more faithfully delivered if they have a close 'fit' with the organisation's mission, current practices and priorities.

Barriers to fidelity

The literature indentifies a range of barriers that can have an adverse impact on implementation fidelity, many of these directly contrast with the drivers of fidelity outlined above. The most common barriers identified include:

- Limitations in time and scheduling conflicts (McBride et al, 2002)
- Lack of clarity in relation to the intervention, its aims and rationale (Carroll et al, 2007)
- Interventions that are over-complex (Carroll et al, 2007)
- Poor quality delivery and/or unenthusiastic stakeholders (Carroll et al, 2007)
- Lack of commitment from managers or those in positions of power within organisations (Dane & Schneider, 1998, cited by Carroll et al, 2007 and Durlak and DuPre, 2008)

Measuring fidelity to the EAL programme – the Carroll et al framework

Drawing on the literature findings, the Carroll et al framework (2007) was chosen to underpin the measurement of fidelity to the EAL programme. As Figure 1 below shows, the main factor driving this decision lay in the comprehensiveness of the framework's approach both in terms of looking beyond mere adherence to programme design and in exploring the relationship between a range of potential moderators and fidelity.

Figure 1: Carroll et al's conceptual framework for implementation fidelity
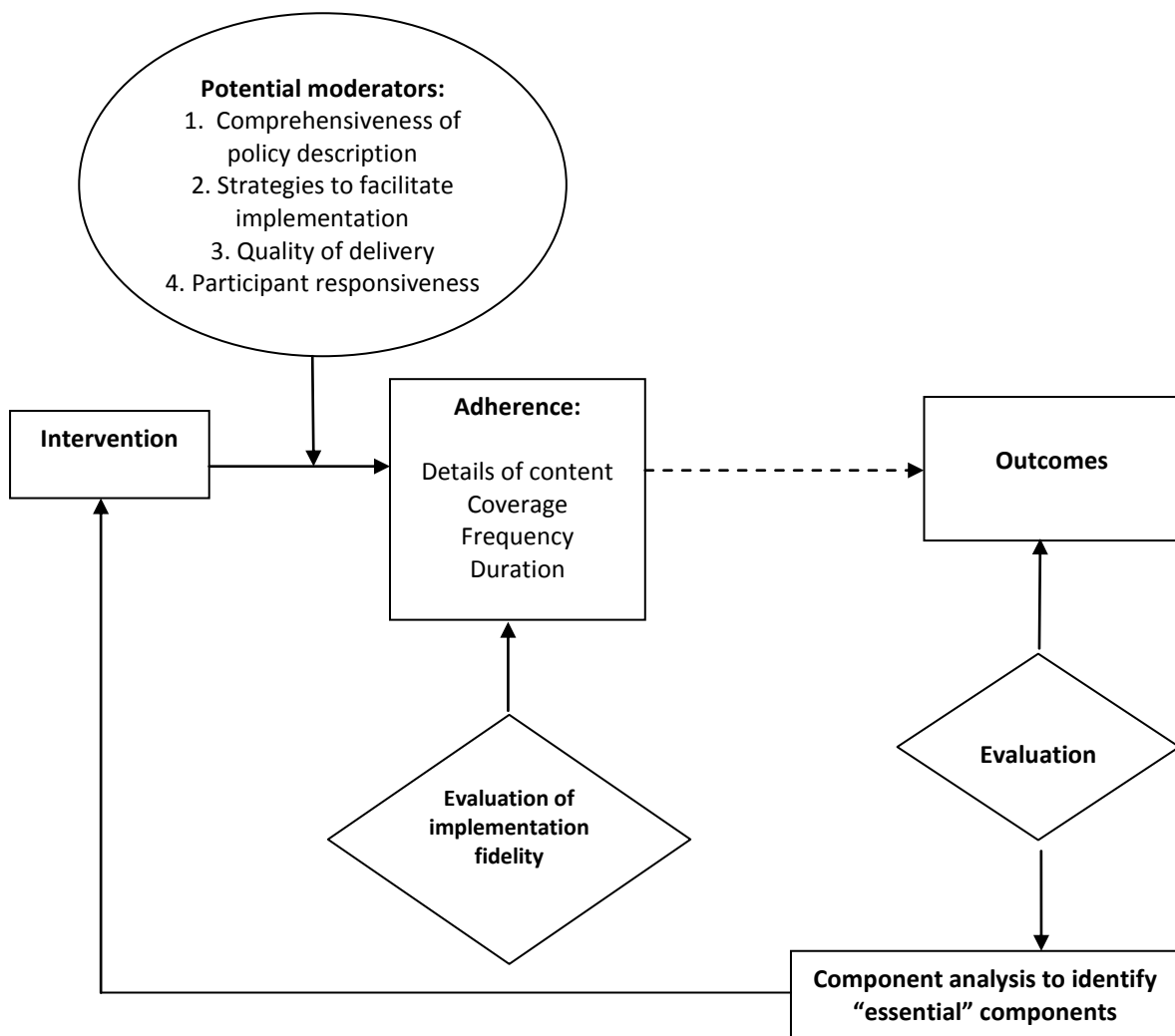
The paragraphs that follow describe each of the components of the theoretical framework as shown above and indicate how they relate to the EAL programme's design, implementation and evaluation.

Intervention: the intervention in this case is the EAL programme as outlined in EAL Service Design.

Adherence: essentially the core measurement of fidelity which assesses whether a programme has been implemented with complete adherence to prescribed content, frequency, duration and coverage. In the case of EAL, this includes assessing the implementation of all six of the programme's main components.

Potential moderators: these are factors that may influence the levels of fidelity and are much more about *how* the intervention is conducted, rather than *what* has been implemented. Potential moderators include the following:

1. The comprehensiveness of the policy description - the description of an intervention may be simple or complex, detailed or vague. The more simple and detailed the description, the greater likelihood of achieving high implementation fidelity. In the case of the EAL programme, this relates to the content of the Service Design Manual as outlined in chapter one of this report.

2. Strategies to facilitate implementation - these are support strategies used to maximise fidelity and include training, monitoring, capacity building and incentives. Where the EAL programme is concerned these mainly include the support provided by the SEYS including initial and cluster training sessions and the on-site mentoring role provided to practitioners throughout the implementation of the programme.

3. Quality of delivery- concerns the manner in which the intervention is delivered and whether this is appropriate to achieving what is intended, e.g. using techniques described in training or a manual; using the theory to back up planning, actions and observations. For the EAL programme, quality of delivery lies in how well each of the programme's components were delivered by the relevant stakeholders – e.g. the SEYS' delivery of initial training, the practitioner's delivery of the developmental movement experiences etc.

4. Participant responsiveness - how much do participants engage in the programme and how enthusiastic are they? For the EAL programme this relates to the responsiveness of all stakeholders involved in implementation of the programme.

Evaluation of implementation fidelity: this is essentially the results of the measurement of adherence and the relationship between adherence and the potential moderators. For the EAL programme, the findings from both these elements are presented in chapter four of this report.

Outcomes: what has changed as a result of the intervention? An intervention may have a range of outcomes for different participants, e.g. children, parents, professionals. For the EAL programme, as outlined in chapter one of this report, there are outcomes for children, parents, practitioners in which the programme is delivered.

The broken line in Figure 1 shows that while implementation fidelity is separate from an intervention's outcome, the extent to which an intervention is delivered with fidelity may affect its impact on target outcomes. The impact of the EAL programme on target outcomes has been evaluated alongside this study and the findings are presented in a separate report prepared by Queen's University, Belfast. This separate report also explores the relationship between the levels of EAL implementation fidelity and the level of impact on intended outcomes.

Component analysis to identify 'essential' components: a component analysis involves using both implementation fidelity data and the outcomes data to determine which, if any, of a programme's components or combination of components is essential to achieving its desired effects. For the EAL programme, this analysis has been conducted and the findings are presented in the separate report prepared by Queens University Belfast.

3 Methodology

This chapter details the research methods used to collect data on fidelity and implementation of the EAL programme. It also outlines the techniques used to analyse the data and generate the findings presented throughout the remaining chapters of this report.

Research methods and participants

Taking note of Durlak and DuPre's (2008) argument that implementation is a process, not an event, and in keeping with the nature of the EAL programme, data on fidelity and implementation were collected from several stakeholders and at several different points across the lifetime of the programme. The paragraphs below describe the research methods used with each of the stakeholders and a copy of all research instruments is included in the appendix document that accompanies this report.

Practitioners
Continuous surveys
Questionnaires were devised to survey practitioners from all of the settings at three stages throughout the year – the timing of each stage corresponded to the completion of implementation of the three types of developmental movement experiences.

The various questionnaires gathered the views and experiences of practitioners regarding fidelity and implementation of all of the programme's components including:

- The initial training (stage one questionnaire)
- The cluster training (stage two and three questionnaire)
- The developmental movement area (stage one questionnaire)
- The developmental movement experiences (all three stages)
- The service design manual (stage two questionnaire)
- The home visits (stage three questionnaire)
- The SEYS support (all three stages)

In addition to the above, the stage two questionnaire also sought practitioners' views on the support provided to them from management in their setting.

The content of the questionnaires was informed by findings from the pilot evaluation of the EAL programme as well as information from the service design manual. Each questionnaire adopted a common format for evaluating fidelity and implementation of each programmes component, namely:

- A series of closed questions to collect adherence/dosage data
- A series of statements arranged on a five point Likert scale to capture process and quality of implementation data
- A small number of open ended questions to generate qualitative data on the drivers of, and barriers to, effective implementation.

Researchers administered the questionnaires to practitioners during cluster training sessions, where practitioners from each setting completed a group questionnaire. A total of 84 questionnaires were

completed, representing a 100% response rate - i.e. a questionnaire was completed by practitioners from all 28 settings at each of the three stages of research.

Following both the stage one and stage two surveys, a series of follow-up, semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners from a selection of settings. The interviews had two main objectives:

- to explore implementation of all elements of the programme in greater depth
- to unpick any of the particularly positive and negative fidelity and implementation ratings reported in surveys

A total of 19 interviews were conducted across a mix of:

- Settings where particularly positive or negative fidelity and implementation ratings were reported in surveys
- Both setting types i.e. day care and Sure Start providers
- Settings with both high and low numbers of EAL trained practitioners
- Settings across each of Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care Trusts
- Settings classified as both urban and rural
- Settings within areas of both high and low deprivation levels.

An interview schedule was devised for each set of interviews which contained the key areas for discussion. Interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis in settings and were facilitated by an experienced researcher. Each interview lasted on average 45 minutes and with participant consent, discussions were recorded and later transcribed.

Managers

A short questionnaire was devised to survey setting managers. The survey gathered feedback on a range of topics, including mangers':

- Motivation for delivering the programme
- Role in delivering the programme
- Views on overall success of programme implementation
- Views on the barriers to, and enablers of, successful implementation
- Intention to continue or otherwise with the programme in the future
- Willingness to recommend the programme to other settings
- Suggestions for how the programme might be improved.

The survey was administered by e-mail and post and a total of 26 managers completed and returned questionnaires.

Parents

To minimise the burden on parents and maximise response rates, questions to gather parents' views on programme implementation were included as part of the post-test questionnaire used to measure impact on parental outcomes.

Given space and time restrictions, only a small number of key fidelity and implementation related questions were included in the questionnaire, namely:

- Attendance at and usefulness of the parent workshop
- The number of home visits received and usefulness of these
- The number of home learning activities implemented and how successful these were
- Usefulness of the home learning manual and resource pack
- Suggestions for programme improvement

Questionnaires were administered to parents during the parent workshop and a total of 186 parents completed a questionnaire.

Senior Early Years Specialists (SEYS)

Senior Early Years Specialists were asked to complete a short questionnaire in order to rate the motivation of practitioners and the engagement of management in each setting. In addition the SEYS provided an overall rating as to how well or otherwise they perceived the EAL programme to have been implemented in each setting and the perceived reasons behind this.

The survey was administered to the SEYS by e-mail and post and a questionnaire was completed and returned for all 28 settings.

Data entry and analysis

Quantitative data

All questionnaire data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and descriptive frequencies analysis was performed to identify and correct any errors in the data. These frequencies were then used to generate a range of data tables and charts.

A series of scoring systems were devised to measure and create a composite score for:

- adherence to the EAL programme design
- the potential moderators of adherence
- the implementation of each of the programme's core components

To explore the relationship between adherence and the potential moderators correlation and regression analyses were performed in SPSS.
The key data tables generated from the analysis and the various scoring systems developed are included in the appendix booklet that accompanies this report.

Qualitative data

Thematic analysis was carried out on the qualitative data generated from both the in-depth interviews and open ended questions in surveys. This involved mapping the views of participants to the key research areas and interview questions, thus allowing for the identification of common themes and sub-themes regarding EAL programme implementation.

The remaining chapters of this report present the findings of the study and the conclusions and recommendations that can be made as a result.

4 Fidelity to the EAL service design

Based on Carroll et al's (2007) framework, this chapter measures how well settings have adhered to the EAL service design across all components of the programme. It also explores the relationship between the potential moderators and the programme components and how the moderators influenced and predicted fidelity levels.

The fidelity measurement

To measure fidelity to the programme design, a series of eight key indicators of fidelity were identified. These included:

1. Practitioner attendance levels at training (both initial and cluster training sessions)
2. Ratio of EAL trained practitioners to children in the setting[2]
3. Number of home visits conducted by practitioners
4. Number of SEYS support visits conducted
5. Proportion of parents attending the workshop
6. Number of developmental Movement Experiences (MEs) completed
7. Duration of implementation of the Movement Experiences (MEs)
8. Frequency of implementation of the developmental Movement Experiences (MEs)

A scoring system was applied whereby settings were awarded a score of one to five for each indicator (one being the lowest score awarded and five the highest), the maximum potential score achievable therefore was 40 and the minimum 8. Further detail on the scoring system is included in the appendix document accompanying this report.

Fidelity scores

Table 1 overleaf shows a breakdown of the fidelity scores achieved by each setting.

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[2] Based on the numbers of EAL trained practitioners:total children in the room in the setting scored on a scale of 1-5 as follows: 1= very low trained practitioner:child ratio, i.e. 1:21 of more; 2= low trained practitioner:child ratio, i.e. 1:15-1:20; 3= medium trained practitioner:child ratio, i.e. 1:10-1:14; high trained practitioner:child ratio, i.e. 1:5-1:9; 5= very high trained practitioner:child ratio, i.e. 1:4 or less.

Table 1: Breakdown of fidelity scores

| Setting ID | Fidelity Indicators | | | | | | | | Total Score | Potential Total | % |
	1. Training attendance	2. Ratio Trained	3. Home visits	4. SEYS Visits	5. Par. Workshop	6. No. of MEs	7. Freq. of MEs	8. Dur. of MEs			
1002	2	2	1	5	1	5	4	5	25	40	63
1010	3	1	1	5	3	5	3	5	26	40	65
1008	5	3	1	5	2	5	5	5	31	40	78
1014	5	2	5	5	3	5	4	3	32	40	80
1006	3	2	5	5	3	5	4	5	32	40	80
1012	5	4	2	5	4	5	4	4	33	40	83
1003	5	2	3	5	4	5	4	5	33	40	83
1009	4	2	2	5	5	5	5	5	33	40	83
1013	5	4	3	5	4	5	4	4	34	40	85
1030	4	3	3	5	5	5	4	5	34	40	85
1020	5	4	5	5	2	5	4	4	34	40	85
1018	4	3	5	5	4	5	3	5	34	40	85
1017	4	2	5	5	4	5	5	5	35	40	88
1004	5	4	5	5	4	5	3	4	35	40	88
1007	3	2	5	5	5	5	5	5	35	40	88
1016	5	3	4	5	3	5	5	5	35	40	88
1019	5	4	3	5	4	5	4	5	35	40	88
1029	5	3	5	5	5	5	4	4	36	40	90
1031	5	5	3	5	4	5	4	5	36	40	90
1015	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	37	40	93
1021	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	37	40	93
1022	5	5	4	5	3	5	5	5	37	40	93
1005	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	38	40	95
1026	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	38	40	95
1028	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	38	40	95
1024	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	38	40	95
1025	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	39	40	98
1027	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	39	40	98
Mean									34.60		87

As Table 1 shows, fidelity levels across almost all settings were very high with the majority of settings achieving 80% or more fidelity. Eleven settings (39%) implemented the EAL programme with almost total fidelity as they achieved over 90%. The two lowest scoring settings (1002 and 1010) although achieving over 60%, did not implement the programme to full fidelity. A number of key drivers of fidelity had been identified which are elaborated on below.

Drivers of fidelity

Looking at the various elements of the fidelity measurement it appears that those aspects of the programme which influenced fidelity levels the most were the ratio of EAL trained practitioners to children, the number of home visits conducted and parents' attendance at the workshop.

Looking firstly at ratios, from Table 1 it can be seen that the settings with lower total scores had relatively poor ratios of trained EAL practitioners to children. Indeed one setting (1010) had a score

of one, indicating that there was only one EAL trained practitioner to 21 or more children[3]. A further seven settings had a score of two, indicating that there was only one EAL trained practitioner to between 15 and 20 children. There was, consequently, a heavy reliance on non-EAL trained practitioners in such settings who often assisted the trained practitioner in implementing the programme. However, eight settings did score five for their ratio score which indicates that there was at least one trained practitioner for four children or less

In relation to home visits, three settings had a score of one (1002, 1010, 1008) - none of these settings conducted any home visits. Two settings had a score of two, indicating that between 21% and 40% of home visits were completed. However, on a more positive note, 11 settings had a score of five which shows that at least 81% of the home visits were completed.

With regard to the parents' workshop, nine settings had a score of five indicating that at least 81% of the parents in the setting attended the workshop. However, three settings scored less than two indicating that less than 40% had attended.

Whilst some of the differences across settings total scores is numerically small and numerically equal (e.g. between 85% and 88% or between 90% and 93%) these differences can be quite significant when we look at the individual scores for the fidelity components e.g. when a setting is getting one or two out of five for these.

Findings from the qualitative data

The qualitative data from practitioners, managers, SEYS and parents identified some of the potential reasons for the low scores in relation to the ratios, home visits and parent workshops, though we have no data from non-attending parents.

Ratio of EAL trained practitioners to children in the setting

Sure Start programmes tended to have higher ratio of EAL trained practitioner:children than day care settings as they tended to send more of their practitioners to the EAL training than was the case for day care settings. Some of the explanation for this lies in the fact that day care settings are open for longer hours and find providing cover for practitioners to attend training is a difficulty:

> I suppose the biggest challenge for me as a manager was making two staff available to attend the course during the working day…

> Sometimes covering two staff to attend training was a challenge.

Number home visits conducted by practitioners

There were four main reasons for the lack of fidelity in relation to the number of home visits conducted:

- Lack of support from management to facilitate the visits being carried out:

> …we never get the time to go on home visits...

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[3] In such settings other non-EAL trained practitioners were also working in the room in compliance with the registration and inspection regulations.

It's a contractual issue really. The girls are employed to work in our day care centre onsite. It's not part of what we do. You don't go in the homes of beneficiaries. There are a lot of issues - there are child protection issues, staff protection issues. It was a step too far with the board. They weren't willing to undertake that extra risk. Even to amend the contracts to facilitate it - it was the whole risk factor of going into people's homes.

- Lack of cooperation from parents:

  Some parents didn't want home visits carried out.

  I didn't see the relevance or necessity.

- Lack of confidence by practitioners:

  I think because you are going into their home you feel a bit uncomfortable… I was just a bit nervous as I have never done it before and didn't know what to expect.

- Timing and logistical issues:

  …we were unable to complete the third [set of] home visits due to time restrictions

These issues are discussed further in the implementation chapter of this report (Chapter five).

Proportion of parents attending the workshop

There were two factors identified as being influential on attendance levels at the workshop. These were:

- Lack of time, especially for working parents:

  It was necessary to arrange the parent workshops over two evenings to ensure attendance (i.e. to offer two alternative evenings for the same parent workshop).

  Work commitments meant I was unable to attend …the workshop.

- General motivation:

  Home visits did not occur at this setting and only approximately half of the parents attended workshops.

Potential moderators of fidelity

The Carroll et al framework outlines six potential moderators that may influence the levels of fidelity achieved during the implementation of an intervention. These are:

- The comprehensiveness of policy description
- Strategies to facilitate implementation
- Quality of delivery
- Quality of settings

- Qualifications at setting level
- Participant responsiveness

Table 2 summarises the various aspects of this study that were used to measure each of the above potential moderators of fidelity to the EAL programme. A detailed overview of this and the scoring system used to calculate the potential moderators can be found in the appendix booklet that accompanies this report.

Table 2: Potential moderator components and how they are measured

Component in model	Measured in EAL by
Comprehensiveness of policy description (i.e. the programme description)	• Usefulness of service design manual (SDM) • Implementation scores re. SDM • Usefulness of Home Learning manual for parents
Strategies to facilitate implementation	• Satisfaction and usefulness ratings of initial and cluster training • Implementation scores from statements re initial training and cluster training • Usefulness of resource pack given to parents (which include the Home Learning Manual) • Usefulness of SEYS support
Quality of delivery	• Implementation scores re. SEYS being engaging and knowledgeable • Rating of SEYS support • Implementation score from practitioners response to statements re their role and concerns for safety • Implementation score from practitioners re. home visits being essential and feeling comfortable doing them • Implementation score from parents usefulness rating of workshops
Quality of settings	• 2009 ECERS and ITERS rating
Qualifications at setting level	• Average qualification held across all EAL practitioners
Participant responsiveness	*Practitioners:* • Statements re. motivation from SEYS[4] • Implementation score from statements re. active role[5] • Response relating to future desire to implement EAL *Managers:* • Support rating from practitioners *Parents:* • Implementation score from statement re. parents' enthusiasm • Proportion of parents attending workshop per setting • Scores from parents responses re. usefulness of workshop – average for setting • Scores from parents responses re. usefulness of home visits – average for setting • Average number of activities done at home as a proportion of all possible • Score re. how well/badly activities went – average score by setting *Children*: • Scores from statements re. children's participation, enjoyment, interest and child-led extending efforts for each movement experience *SEYS:* • Scores from statements re. SEYS support across all three waves

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[4] SEYS were asked to score practitioners regarding motivation on a scale of 1-5 where 1= not at all motivated and 5 =very motivated according to given definitions – see Appendix F: Information from SEYS.

[5] Practitioners were asked to what extent they played an active role in and extended each of the 12 movement experiences – see Appendices C, D and E

The relationship between the potential moderators and fidelity

When each of the potential moderators were measured, Pearson correlations were conducted in SPSS to explore the relationship between these and the total fidelity scores. Table 3 shows the correlation coefficients for each of the potential moderators:

Table 3: The correlation coefficients and significance for the potential moderators

Potential moderator	Pearson Correlation	Significance (1-tailed)
Comprehensiveness of the policy description	.380*	.023
Strategies to facilitate implementation	.333*	.042
Quality of delivery	.767**	.000
Quality of settings	.073	.357
Qualifications	.160	.208
Participant responsiveness	.765**	.000

N=28 at all times
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1 tailed)
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1 tailed)

Looking at Table 3 it can be seen that four out of six potential moderators are positively related with fidelity. The findings indicate that higher levels of fidelity are significantly related with higher levels of comprehensiveness of the policy description, higher levels of strategies to facilitate implementation, better quality of delivery and higher levels of participant responsiveness. Quality of settings (as measured by ECERS and ITERS) and qualifications are not significantly related to total fidelity scores.

As correlations only indicate individual relationships between each of the moderators and the total fidelity score, regression analysis was conducted to explore which moderator is significantly related to the fidelity score after controlling for all other moderators. A series of regression models were conducted and detailed results are presented in the appendix booklet. The final finding indicates that after controlling for all six moderators only quality of delivery of the programme (as opposed to quality of the setting) is significantly related to the fidelity score (β=.814, p=.000) and as a significant predictor in a final regression model it explains 57.2% of the variation in fidelity scores. This suggests that a high level of fidelity is predicted by better quality of delivery and other moderators are not relevant predictors of fidelity when quality of delivery is taken into account.

Summary

The EAL programme was implemented with very high levels of fidelity across all 28 settings, with six settings achieving almost full fidelity (95% or more). In terms of comparisons with other fidelity studies in real work settings, it is very difficult to find a definitive answer as the examples in the literature do not tend to give absolute answers in percentage or scoring terms. However, correspondence from another research organisation which used this model generated fidelity scores of between 65-85% (personal communication to research team). The average for EAL is 87%, which is higher than this comparison.

The aspects of the programme which had the greatest adverse impact on fidelity levels were the following:

- A low ratio of EAL trained practitioners to children in the setting

- A low number of home visits conducted by practitioners
- A low level of management support for the implementation of the EAL programme to full service design
- Parents not attending the workshops

5 Implementing the EAL programme

Introduction

This chapter goes beyond the Carroll et al framework and provides an in-depth examination of the process of implementation of the EAL programme. In doing so, it draws on both the quantitative and qualitative data collected from stakeholders regarding their experiences of implementing each of the programme's core components, including:

- The initial practitioner training
- The cluster training
- The SEYS support (including mentoring, resources and changes to indoor and outdoor environments)
- The service design manual
- The developmental movement experiences
- Home learning

In addition to the above components, the role of management in supporting the implementation of the EAL programme is also explored in this chapter. The final section of this chapter outlines the impact of the programme on practice with children aged two-to-three-year-olds and the learning that occurred for practitioners and parents as a result of EAL.

As outlined in the methodology, implementation data was mainly gathered via a series of stakeholder surveys and a scoring system was developed and applied to the data to assess the extent to which implementation was a positive or negative experience. Stakeholders were given a range of implementation statements relating to each of the programme's components and were asked to rate their agreement with them on a five point scale where five was strongly agree and one was strongly disagree. Corresponding scores were then applied to these ratings, with five being the highest score that could be achieved per statement and one the lowest. The individual scores for statements were then added together to produce a composite implementation score for each setting and each programme component. The score for each setting was then coded into one of five scoring ranges from very low to very high.

The data from surveys were then used to inform the selection of settings for taking part in a qualitative depth interview to explore in greater detail the reasons behind the high or low implementation scores generated.

The remainder of this chapter takes each of the programme's components and:

- Outlines the range of implementation statements and questions included in the survey
- Presents and discusses the implementation scores and ratings generated from the survey data
- Highlights findings from the qualitative data that further explain implementation scores and ratings

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main enabling and inhibiting factors of effective implementation of the EAL programme.

The initial practitioner training

Data on the initial training was collected in the first wave of practitioner surveys as training took place in September/October 2009. The initial practitioner training covered the following areas:

- Understanding two year old children
- Introduction to the service design manual
- How the physical environment supports learning and development for two year olds
- Developmental movement experiences in group settings
- Using the service design manual
- Home learning experiences
- Interacting and engaging with young children
- Working in partnership with parents
- Home visits

Implementation statements and survey questions

A series of seven implementation statements were included in the questionnaire and covered the training's:

- Fitness for purpose
- Suitability of format
- Style of delivery
- Impact on practice and confidence

In addition to the implementation statements, practitioners were also asked to rate their overall satisfaction levels with the training and to provide reasons for their ratings.

Implementation scores and ratings

Based on the seven statements, settings could award a maximum score of 35 and a minimum score of seven for implementation of the initial practitioner training. Table 4 below shows the distribution of implementation scores.

Table 4: Distribution of initial training implementation scores

Score category	Score range	Number of settings
Very low	7-12	
Low	13-18	
Medium	19-24	1
High	25-29	10
Very high	30-35	17
Total		28

As can be seen from Table 4, the overall picture is extremely positive with almost all settings awarding either high or very high scores to the implementation of the initial training. Furthermore, it is worthwhile noting that a total of three settings awarded the maximum score of 35 and no settings scored less than 24.

These high scores are due to practitioners reporting very positive experiences about the various elements of the initial training especially its fitness for purpose, how it inspired confidence, how it achieved a good balance between theory and practice and the effective delivery style used by the trainers.

Given these scores, it is not surprising that practitioners also reported high overall satisfaction levels with the initial training. Figure 2 below shows that 86% of settings were satisfied with the initial training and a high proportion of these were very satisfied (68%).

Figure 2: Satisfaction ratings for initial training
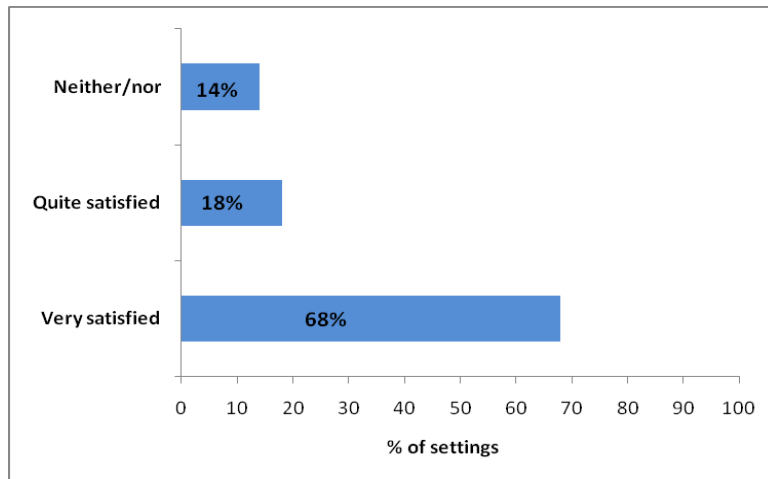
Findings from the qualitative data

In general the qualitative findings support the quantitative data outlined above as all practitioners spoke very positively of the initial training programme. Particular strengths of the training centred on the new learning gained by practitioners and how this was contributing to improved practice. Specifically, the new learning included:

- Gaining a better understanding of children's developmental movement areas and why working with young children in these areas is important:

    In this one (EAL) they actually show you how to do the activities and ask you why you are doing them... It explains what part of the body they are using. Like that vestibular, that explains it better than the two year old programme[6] why you would do these things...You understand more what benefits them (the children).

- Changing and improving the physical layout of settings to benefit children's development:

    I feel we have learnt so much from the training. It has helped us to improve our technique and to change our room to help enhance learning.

- Understanding the importance of placing materials at an appropriate height and level for young children:

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[6] The Department of Education's Two-Year-Old Programme

> …It opened your eyes to see the differences …we did the clay and we had it on the table and then we had it on the floor to see what difference it had. It opened your eyes to see which way we would all communicate so obviously the kids would be the same.

Some practitioners did also raise a number of common concerns regarding the initial training. These included:

- Some overlap of content with other training, specifically that undertaken for the Department of Education's Two-Year-Old programme:

> I think it is hard as we have done the two year old training. If they could find out if you have done it and then you could skip the first few weeks if you already have done it. In the two year old training it was about observation and planning and there was one of the weeks this programme had observations and planning. So if they could tally them together.

- Difficulties in accessing all of the training sessions due to staff shortages:

> With no fault of anyone's, we hardly got to classes and if we did, we had to leave early (due to a shortage of staff), so we were quite confused at what to do. However, the training and aftercare was excellent and of great help and benefit.

Practitioners from two settings also identified the following individual concerns:

- A lack of cognisance taken of the differences between the two types of settings attending i.e. Sure Start and day care:

> We thought that the training wasn't clearly delivered for a nursery unit point of view as home visits etc are very new to us.

- The difference in approach of some SEYS, especially where there was not an existing relationship established between the practitioners and the SEYS:

> When we did the training in [a different area] the SEYS wasn't [our own one] - we felt that she was about the settings she was involved in…We felt ignored…She asked the other settings questions and ignored the things that we said. I don't know if it was just that she didn't know us.

Most practitioners were unable to identify any suggestions for how the initial training could be improved. The few suggestions identified were the following:

- Reduce the six-weeks of training by combining weeks four and six, both of which focused on elements of the home learning package:

> I don't know if it should be over the six weeks. There was an information day or training day on home visits and it was a whole day thing when it really didn't need to be. I think probably they could combine those two (weeks four and six).

- Make the training more practical in orientation:

… Maybe more focus on how to run the programme rather than…understanding two year olds which we did in our NVQs. Learn more how to implement it all together to keep going through the term.

Made less like school – more practical (and) engage with all groups.

The cluster training

Data on the cluster training was collected in the second and third waves of practitioner surveys as cluster training sessions took place at regular intervals from December 2009 to June 2010. The cluster training covered the following areas:

- The physical environment and cross-lateral development
- Observations and vestibular development
- Planning and proprioceptive development
- Working in partnership with parents and the way forward

Implementation statements and survey questions

A series of nine implementation statements were included in the questionnaire and covered the cluster training's:

- Fitness for purpose
- Suitability of format
- Style of delivery
- Ability to enable reflective practice
- Impact in terms of facilitating delivery of EAL

Implementation scores and ratings

Based on the nine statements, settings could award a maximum score of 45 and a minimum score of nine regarding implementation of the cluster training. Table 5 below shows the distribution of scores across the settings.

Table 5: The distribution of cluster training implementation scores

Score category	Score range	Number of settings
Very low	9-16	
Low	17-23	
Medium	24-30	
High	31-37	8
Very high	38-45	20
Total		**28**

As can be seen from Table 5, the implementation scores for the cluster training echo those of the initial training with all settings scoring either highly or very highly. Practitioners were very positive about the sessions and rated them as being particularly beneficial in enabling the sharing of experiences with other practitioners, in generating new ideas for using resources and in helping them to use observations in planning.

As Figure 3 overleaf shows, practitioners from almost all settings felt that all four cluster sessions were useful. Whilst there was a slight drop off in percentage ratings for sessions three and four

(which covered planning and proprioceptive development and working in partnership with parents and the way forward respectively), it is important to note that it equates to only one setting.

Figure 3: The usefulness of cluster training sessions

Findings from the qualitative data

On the whole the qualitative findings are similar to the quantitative data outlined above as practitioners made numerous positive comments about the cluster training. According to practitioners, the main strength of the cluster training lay in the opportunity it afforded them to share implementation experiences and ideas with other practitioners at the sessions. This was thought to have been particularly beneficial in two ways:

- Providing reassurance regarding common implementation difficulties and achievements:

    The clusters were very good because you would have something implemented and you might have had a question as to how else you could provide it or something else and you could come and ask other people how they provided it…It's nice too to find out that other people are facing the same difficulties or achievements.

    The cluster training was great as you got other people's opinions and how they were doing things and how it was working… How it was going in other places. Sometimes you would think it wasn't going great there but then you find out that it didn't work somewhere else.

- Generating more ideas on implementing the movement experiences and how to extend them:

    You got a lot of ideas on how the other nurseries extended the activities. It was good to hear everyone else's feedback.

    You were able to come back and talk about the experiences and where you were at with the experiences. It was also helpful to hear the other settings' experiences and they gave you ideas.

A common issue for some practitioners regarding the cluster sessions was a lack of balance in terms of the types of settings that were attending and how this could be, at times, intimidating:

> …The only thing (was)...you got one group talking the whole time…'cos they thought they were super… Because we were…with all the Sure Starts and we were the only day care…it was very intimidating…

Practitioners made a number of suggestions as to how the cluster training might be improved for future implementation. These varied across settings and included:

- Scheduling an additional refresher session after the initial year of implementation:

  > I think there should be something there in September/October time (following the first year of implementation). Just to see how the other girls are doing or if there is something new, we would be kept informed.

  > I know when we did the two year old programme we did a refresher course and I always felt a refresher would have been good for the Eager and Able (to Learn) too.

- Reducing the gap between the last week of initial training and the first cluster session:

  > It ended in September and then you are going to January and you forget. Maybe if it wasn't as big a gap.

- Spreading out the cluster sessions more over the course of the year:

  > I just think the cluster groups should be spread out. You have the last one in March but the programme still runs to June. So you could have that March one in June. The February one could be around Easter.

- Increasing the content and advice on working with parents in general:

  > Perhaps a bit more training on how to work with parents in general besides just the home visits. A lot of practice would be handy.

The service design manual

Data on the service design manual (SDM) was collected in the second wave of practitioner surveys during March 2010. As outlined in Chapter one of this report, the manual's content includes:

- The theory and rationale underpinning the programme's design
- A detailed outline of each of the developmental movement experiences
- The fan of possible learning for each developmental movement experience
- A timetable showing the schedule which should be followed for implementing the movement experiences
- The home learning manual that is provided separately to parents.

Implementation statements and survey questions

A range of nine statements were used to rate the role of the SDM in facilitating programme implementation. The statements focused on the manual's:

- Clarity in terms of the programme's overall aim
- Accessibility in terms of language and layout
- Ability to help practitioners understand how the movement experiences enhance children's development
- Clarity regarding the practitioners' role in implementation
- Clarity about the duration and frequency of implementation of the movement experiences
- Adequacy in terms of suggestions for how the movement experiences could be extended
- Ability to help practitioners undertake the home visits

Implementation scores and ratings

Based on the nine statements, settings could award a maximum score of 45 and a minimum score of nine regarding the role of the manual in aiding programme implementation. The overall distribution of scores is shown by Table 6.

Table 6: The distribution of Service Design Manual implementation scores

Score category	Score range	Number of settings
Very low	9-16	
Low	17-23	
Medium	24-30	
High	31-37	12
Very high	38-45	16
Total		**28**

As can be seen from Table 6, all of the settings scored the SDM either highly or very highly in terms of its role in facilitating implementation. Furthermore, it is worthwhile noting that four of the settings awarded the manual the maximum score of 45 whilst the lowest score awarded was 32. Practitioners identified the following aspects of the manual as being particularly beneficial in aiding implementation: its clarity in relation to the aim of EAL, its layout, and its ability to aid their understanding of how the movement experiences enhanced children's development.

Mirroring the scores above, Figure 4 below shows that practitioners in all of the settings felt that the manual was useful with the majority (79%) indicating that it was very useful.

Figure 4: The usefulness of the Service Design Manual
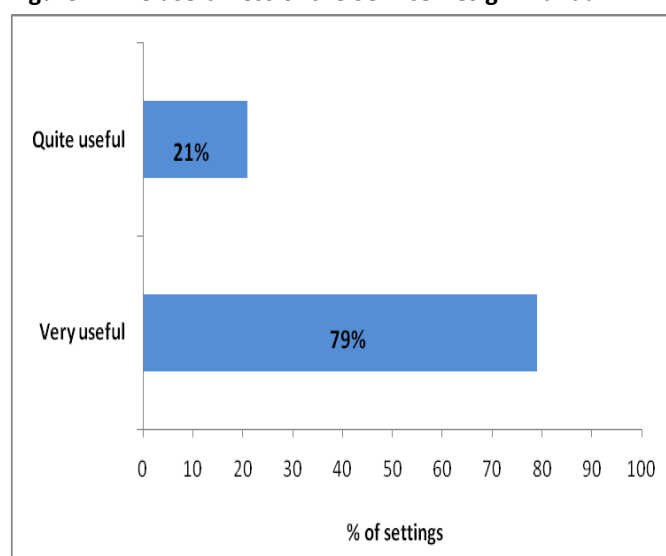
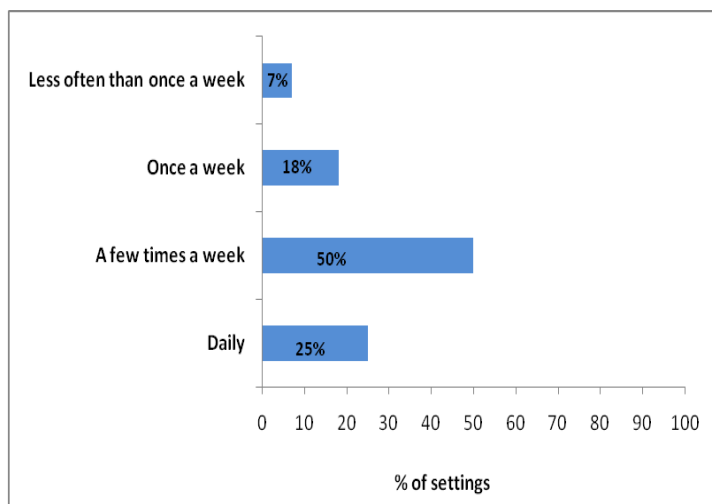In the survey, practitioners were also asked to indicate how often they referred to the service design manual and as Figure 5 below shows, it was well utilised with a quarter of settings indicating that they referred to it on a daily basis and half saying that they referred to it a few times a week.

Figure 5: Frequency of use of Service Design Manual

Findings from the qualitative data

On the whole, practitioners commented positively on the service design manual and in interview discussions referred to the manual's many strengths in aiding programme implementation. Practitioners particularly valued:

- How the manual highlighted the developmental gains the children can benefit from, particularly given the inclusion of the fan of possible learning for each experience:

> I found the fan of learning at the back can help a) with your planning and b) with your observations. Sometimes it's difficult for staff to get their heads round what is cognitive development? What is it I'm supposed to be doing? It was useful in that way.

> We found it very useful because we very often refer back to the fan of possible learning and it helps with observations and planning. We found it a necessity.

> It has been really good especially the fan of possible learning. It makes you think and think beyond…It's good as well for the parents' days. We have actually put it up around the room. It's made them think 'he's getting that and if I just add in those words he'll understand more of what he's doing'. It's given them something to think about as well...We put up the four areas (in the fan of possible learning). So say if it was making dough we put up the fan of possible learning and the language you would use. It's trying to encourage them to use the language at home as well. We then gave them a copy of what we had done and the resources we used.

> The fan of learning… has made us step back and think about reducing down what we were expecting. It broke it down into four areas so we are not trying to spread it

out into maths development and science …We have got a lot of ideas from the pictures and we have put some of them up.

- How it enhanced their awareness and understanding of the theory behind the programme - why they were doing the movement experiences and the impact of these on the children. This in turn led to practitioners having an increased recognition of the importance of their work than previously held.

  Although we have been doing the things it makes you think about the things and how the children are actually benefiting from it. It makes it more important what you are doing in your job.

  Found sections three and four on theoretical considerations particularly useful in giving the background of the programme.

  I think the stuff at the start included the theory information about the benefits between the link between the home and the group. I thought they were very good and they had a few quotes in there about how beneficial the intervention is. I thought they were useful rather than just have a practical manual.

- How the layout of the manual and its language made it accessible and easy to use:

  Sometimes you do training and you come home and the theory book stays there. It's easy to use and is in a language everybody understands

- How it acted as a useful reminder of material covered in the initial training and as a constant source of reference:

  It had lots of information that I could go back and check I was implementing the experiences properly.

  It refreshed our memories from the course as the first one was so far away. We are doing stop and start so we are looking back so it has refreshed us.

  I need to look at the parents section again just to refresh what I am meant to be doing.

- How it helped to explain the programme to non-EAL trained colleagues who were assisting in the implementation of the programme:

  …when we are explaining it, we can't explain fully. It helps them (non-EAL trained practitioners) understand what we have to do.

- How it helped with observations and planning future work with the children:

  Doing our planning on the areas of their development is quite good, for our observations knowing what to look out for.

On the other hand, some practitioners also identified a number of issues relating to the service design manual, some of which were in direct contrast to the benefits outlined above. The issues varied across settings and included:

- The perceived repetitious nature of the fans of possible learning for each movement experience:

  > I found some of the fans of learning were a bit repetitive but they are all physical so that is probably why it's repetitive. It's for all physical development…. If it was a complete programme then the fan of learning would be juicier.

- The fact that the manual's content covers some of the initial training content which was thought to be unnecessary duplication:

  > This is what the training is about it's there in this wee book.

  > We did do bits in the class so sometimes I just refer to my notes rather than go to it.

- The lack of time available to utilise the manual to its fullest potential:

  > It's a time thing. I have to do a taxi run which means there is one member of staff. We struggle for time anyway.

  > There's just too much stuff going on. We are one of the busiest rooms as we have toilet training and nappies. It's just hard to find the time to sit down and go over it.

Practitioners across settings made several suggestions as to how the service design manual might be improved. These suggestions included:

- Improving the design and layout to be more graphically appealing and specifically making more use of pictures instead of descriptive text:

  > Perhaps make the cover 'more inviting' – it's not a book you would always 'reach' for.

  > Make it more modern. It doesn't look like something you're here to learn from. It looks like something you would get at school. They should jazz it up or something. That's a brilliant photograph but they need to make it more appealing.

  > It's just a big book. You can't see pictures of what's going on or what's happening like a before and after kind of thing.

  > If there wasn't so much writing (it would be better as) you don't have lots of time to sit and read it. You have to get time to sit down and read it fully.

- Having a more detailed section on home visits, which would be more explicit in outlining their purpose, examples of how practitioners might approach them and a 'trouble shooting' sub-section to give practitioners ideas on dealing with challenging situations in relation to the home visits:

  > Maybe something a bit more about the parenting side.

Maybe as you know there is information at the start about the home visits and the parents just get the activities section. If that (the home visit information) was in with the parents (manual) that would be a good idea.

A bit more information for us (on home visiting) would be good.

- Including more content on conducting observations and planning:

There's nothing in there about the observations is there? The way of doing the observations is all new to us.

We don't actually have a part of the book that talks about (observations) or touches on it. It is mostly the practice and the activities. The observations even when we did them in cluster meetings there was video footage along with it and that was really helpful.

- Creating a summary document or poster of the core SDM content that could be easily displayed and read by all practitioners:

…just a small pack of the main points of it…a smaller version of it- get a copy of it so that they (non-EAL trained staff) can see it.

The developmental movement experiences

Data on the implementation of each of the developmental movement experiences was collected across all three waves of the practitioner surveys as these were a continuous element of the programme. In total there were 12 movement experiences to be implemented throughout the year: four for each of the three different areas of development – cross-lateral, vestibular and proprioceptive.

Implementation statements and survey questions

Depending on whether or not the movement experience required the use of resources, a series of either 11 or 13 implementation statements were included in the questionnaire. The statements were asked in relation to each movement experience and covered the following:

- The role of the practitioner in implementing the experience
- The accessibility of associated resources to the children (where appropriate)
- The initiation of extension activities on the part of both practitioners and children
- Children's levels of engagement, enjoyment and enthusiasm for the movement experience
- The adequacy of the physical space available for implementation
- The level of risk aversion (health and safety concerns) emanating from practitioners

Implementation scores and ratings

The scoring for the series of statements ranged from 13 to 65 where resources were attached to the experience and from 11 to 55 where there were no resources involved. The more positive the process and quality of implementing the movement experience, the higher the score. The distribution of overall scores for implementation of all of the movement experiences is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: The distribution of overall scores for implementation of the developmental movement experiences

Score category	Score range	Number of settings
Very low	152-273	
Low	274-395	
Medium	396-517	1
High	518-639	15
Very high	640+	12
Total		**28**

As Table 7 indicates the process of implementing the developmental movement experiences was largely a very positive one for all of the settings, with only one setting achieving less than a high rating and 12 settings achieving a very high rating. Where settings attained very high scores, this was usually for two reasons – (i) either they achieved the maximum score available for several of the individual movement experiences or (ii) they achieved consistently high implementation scores across all of the experiences.

Given the significant role that the movement experiences play in implementation of the EAL programme, the following sections explore the data further and present the implementation scores achieved for the movement experiences targeted at each of the 3 developmental areas – cross lateral, vestibular and proprioceptive.

Table 8: Implementation scores for cross-lateral movement experiences.

Setting ID	This way that a way*	Creepy crawly	Climbing & clambering	I love shoes	Setting total	Potential total achievable	%
1002	35	48	44	40	167	250	**67**
1003	48	54	48	53	203	250	**81**
1004	40	56	36	39	171	250	**68**
1005	48	38	55	46	187	250	**75**
1006	49	53	51	59	212	250	**85**
1007	48	58	54	61	221	250	**88**
1008	51	53	55	62	221	250	**88**
1009	50	58	57	59	224	250	**90**
1010	37	48	47	50	182	250	**73**
1012	49	65	65	54	233	250	**93**
1013	42	61	52	58	213	250	**85**
1014	47	51	53	55	206	250	**82**
1015	37	57	47	41	182	250	**73**
1016	49	59	55	50	213	250	**85**
1017	45	60	59	57	221	250	**88**
1018	37	46	48	40	171	250	**68**
1019	43	45	52	50	190	250	**76**
1020	40	36	42	^	118	185	**64**
1021	51	56	53	46	206	250	**82**
1022	34	60	52	50	196	250	**78**
1024	47	61	59	60	227	250	**91**
1025	38	52	52	46	188	250	**75**
1026	49	52	54	55	210	250	**84**
1027	50	61	58	61	230	250	**92**
1028	47	54	56	52	209	250	**84**
1029	48	48	55	^	151	185	**82**
1030	41	51	52	53	197	250	**79**
1031	49	59	54	48	210	250	**84**
Potential total (each experience)	55	65	65	65			
Potential total (all settings)	1540	1820	1820	1690			
Actual total (all settings)	1249	1500	1465	1345			
%	**81**	**81**	**80**	**80**			

*No resources attached to this movement experience

^ A blank cell indicates that the movement experience was not implemented in a setting. Where this is the case - in settings 1020 and 1029 with I Love Shoes above - the potential total columns in the table have been adjusted accordingly.

Reading the percentages at the bottom of Table 8, it can be seen that each of the cross lateral movement experiences scored highly (80% or more), indicating an overall positive process of implementation.

In terms of the individual settings' scores, the table presents a more varied picture. The highest scoring was setting 1012 with a score of 233 out of 250 (93%) and it can be seen that this setting achieved the highest score possible for two of the movement experiences - Creepy crawly and climbing and clambering. The lowest scoring setting, on the other hand, setting 1020, scored a total of 118 out of 185 (64%). It can be seen that for each individual movement experience, this setting achieved relatively lower scores than other settings across the board but in particular for the Creepy

Crawly experience. The survey results revealed that this particularly low score is due to practitioners not fully understanding their role in implementing the movement experience, lack of accessibility of resources during and after the experience was implemented, lack of physical space for implementation, difficulty in maintaining children's interest and lack of extension activities on the practitioners' behalf.

Table 9: Implementation scores for vestibular movement experiences.

Setting ID	Stepping stones	Row row your boat*	Rolling	Sliding	Setting total	Potential total achievable	%
1002	48	35	35	55	173	250	69
1003	52	43	43	52	190	250	76
1004	48	46	46	55	195	250	78
1005	57	52	52	62	223	250	89
1006	45	52	52	51	200	250	80
1007	44	42	42	50	178	250	71
1008	63	52	52	65	232	250	93
1009	60	50	50	58	218	250	87
1010	45	37	37	48	167	250	67
1012	58	42	42	57	199	250	80
1013	53	42	42	57	194	250	78
1014	59	49	49	59	216	250	86
1015	52	41	41	55	189	250	76
1016	48	42	42	52	184	250	74
1017	57	48	48	55	208	250	83
1018	52	42	42	50	186	250	74
1019	60	48	48	58	214	250	86
1020	50	40	40	46	176	250	70
1021	63	49	49	60	221	250	88
1022	62	51	51	63	227	250	91
1024	61	51	51	62	225	250	90
1025	53	47	47	55	202	250	81
1026	62	42	42	64	210	250	84
1027	52	44	44	48	188	250	75
1028	60	50	50	64	224	250	90
1029	59	48	48	59	214	250	86
1030	60	51	51	55	217	250	87
1031	61	40	40	60	201	250	80
Potential total (each experience)	65	55	65	65			
Potential total (all settings)	1820	1540	1820	1820			
Actual total (all settings)	1544	1276	1276	1575			
%	85	83	70	87			

*No resources attached to this movement experience

In terms of the vestibular movement experiences the process of implementation was again largely positive with all of the four experiences scoring highly. However, there was a marked difference in scoring with three of the experiences - stepping stones, row your boat and sliding scoring 83% or more whereas rolling scored 70%. The practitioner survey results show a variety of reasons for this lower score including a lack of physical space and difficulties in holding the children's engagement. However, the biggest contributing factor lay in practitioner concerns for safety which was cited by 25% of respondents.

In terms of the individual settings, setting 1008 scored the highest achieving a total of 232 out of 250 (93%) and it can be seen that this setting achieved the maximum or close to the maximum score achievable for three of the four movement experiences – stepping stones, row your boat and sliding. Setting 1010 scored the lowest achieving 167 out of a total 250 (67%). When looking at the individual data for this setting, it can be seen that it achieved relatively poor scores for implementation of all four movement experiences compared to most other settings. The survey data revealed that in this setting common barriers to implementation of these four movement experiences lay in practitioners' lack of understanding or their role in implementation, difficulties in engaging and maintaining children's interest and a lack of adequate space for implementation.

Table 10: Implementation scores for proprioceptive movement experiences

Setting ID	Catch me if you can	Pinch poke pull	Builder's Yard	Stop start	Setting total	Potential total achievable	%
1002	45	46	47	45	183	260	70
1003	50	49	51	50	200	260	77
1004	49	37	52	43	181	260	70
1005	60	59	57	47	223	260	86
1006	50	53	51	47	201	260	77
1007	59	62	62	62	245	260	94
1008	63	63	63	61	250	260	96
1009	62	50	51	56	219	260	84
1010	46	38	49	43	176	260	68
1012	51	56	^	50	157	195	81
1013	51	^	55	51	157	195	81
1014	50	53	52	54	209	260	80
1015	54	48	57	52	211	260	81
1016	59	56	55	57	227	260	87
1017	55	57	60	47	219	260	84
1018	49	45	48	48	190	260	73
1019	51	50	49	48	198	260	76
1020	51	40	43	46	180	260	69
1021	61	59	62	62	244	260	94
1022	60	62	64	62	248	260	95
1024	59	59	58	60	236	260	91
1025	61	47	65	45	218	260	84
1026	61	62	58	63	244	260	94
1027	65	65	65	65	260	260	100
1028	57	56	61	60	234	260	90
1029	52	52	51	50	205	260	79
1030	58	50	64	62	234	260	90
1031	59	59	57	59	234	260	90
Potential total (each experience)	65	65	65	65			
Potential total (all settings)	1820	1755	1755	1820			
Actual total (all settings)	1548	1433	1507	1495			
%	85	82	86	82			

^ A blank cell indicates that the movement experience was not implemented in a setting. Where this is the case - in settings 1012 for Builder's yard and 1013 for Pinch, poke, pull - the potential total columns in the table have been adjusted accordingly.

Reading the percentages at the bottom of Table 10, it can be seen that each of the proprioceptive movement experiences scored highly (82% or more), indicating an overall positive process of implementation.

In terms of the individual settings' scores, the table shows a more varied picture. The highest scoring was setting 1027 with a score of 260 out of 260 (100%), i.e. this setting achieved the highest score possible for implementing each of the four movement experiences. However, if looking at the lowest scoring setting, again setting 1010 with a total score of 176 out of 260 (68%), it can be seen that this setting achieved relatively poor scores for implementing all four of the movement experiences compared to most other settings. The survey data shows that reasons for the lower scores in this setting were a lack of understanding among practitioners about their role in implementation, a lack of physical space, practitioner safety concerns and a reported lack of engagement and interest among children. It is worthwhile noting that this setting also achieved one of the lowest fidelity scores (see Table 1, Chapter 4) due to having a low ratio of trained EAL practitioners working with children, poor attendance at training sessions and poor implementation of home visits. This would suggest that training plays an important role in ensuring high quality implementation of the developmental movement experiences.

Overall, Tables 8, 9 and 10 have shown that the process of implementing all the developmental movement experiences has been relatively positive, with no movement experience scoring less than 70% of the maximum score achievable for implementation and in fact the majority scoring more than 80%. However, the data in the tables does show that variability in implementation exists at *individual setting level* and the common reasons for this are a combination of practitioners' lack of understanding of their role, practitioner concerns about safety and perceived difficulties in engaging children and maintaining their interest in experiences.

Findings from the qualitative data

The qualitative data identified many factors that contributed to the positive implementation scores achieved by settings for the movement experiences. These included:

- The children's engagement in, enjoyment and enthusiasm for the experiences:

  They absolutely enjoyed [the movement experiences] so there was no bother at all with [them].

  The children loved (This way that a way). We introduced new words and the children…to this day, still do the activity, by themselves -doing the actions and using words we introduced. Also they came up with their own suggestions.

- The ease and extent to which the movement experiences were able to be developed and how this was led by both practitioners and the children:

  We allowed children to make up their own ideas [for I love shoes].

  We used different types of stepping stone to further develop the children, e.g. flat mats and raised stones, to develop their balance. The stepping stones are kept out at all times. We were very actively involved with the children the first few weeks, now the children don't need our involvement so much.

We extended the activity by singing 'Rock, rock, rock your boat' where we rock from side to side. The children loved the activity and suggested different animals to scream about at the end.

The children introduced the game 'tig' and decided to catch each other as they ran about playing [Catch me if you can].

- The suitably challenging nature of some of the experiences:

[One child] was afraid of it so we started encouraging him to come over and watch us as we were standing at the end of the tunnel. He was watching and he could see that the children could go up through and come out. Now he has come round and he is doing it too.

Extended [sliding] to sliding on icy ground outside, under supervision.

- Having adequate space both indoors and outdoors to facilitate effective implementation of experiences:

We had quite a big open space. We had a lot of room for it and you can space everything out…The basic things that you would do outside you just bring it inside with the blocks and the slide.

We implemented (Stepping stones and Catch me if you can) indoors and outdoors.

- Practitioners fully understanding their role in implementation i.e. to be both active in implementing the movement experiences with the children but also to stand back when appropriate in order to facilitate independent play:

Instead of being so hands on with 'rolling' we helped the children and showed them how to roll on their bellies and…on their backs but once they got the hang of it, they were showing each other and helping each other and didn't need any guidance.

The children didn't need our guidance for sliding. We supervised them to ensure they were safe. However, we did talk to the children during the activity and helped develop their language.

We gave the children the language when doing (I love shoes) but our overall involvement was relaxed as the children worked to explore the shoes themselves, but asked for help when needed. We extended the activity by putting holes in milk cartons and letting the children wear them.

In contrast, practitioners also identified a range of factors that they perceived to have inhibited effective implementation of the experiences. These factors were more common in settings that achieved lower implementation scores and included:

- Health and safety concerns associated with implementing some of the movement experiences, particularly I love shoes, Sliding and Rolling:

[I love shoes] was not carried out in our setting due to nursery policy...due to past safety experiences.

There were a couple of safety concerns with rolling due to lack of space and number of children, although it was fun for the children to carry it out.

...a couple of safety concerns as the children all seemed to want to play with the slide at the same time and for the whole day.

It is worthwhile noting that some of the risk aversion identified by practitioners can be explained by the context in which settings are regulated and inspected and the conflicting issues this raises for them.

Some of the ideas [the SEYS] gave us we haven't been able to use … because some of the things we had to take to social services. I think before this (EAL) was done if it had been taken straight to social services and [explained]...We had our inspection and she came in and looked at [what we were doing and] how...She was happy enough but still you were constantly having to explain to her and she was still standing looking at me. Her face said it all - she doesn't get this. Even I gave her the manual and she still looked blank at me.

We found that some of the outside agencies like the social worker we have attached to day care here - we work with glass and delicate cups - we think children should be exposed to all that. They are learning that the cup is heavy -be careful if it breaks - so it's all a learning thing. So they would say 'health and safety right away…oh we can't have that'. So it's different agencies realising where we are coming from as well.

- Difficulty in holding children's attention and feeling that some of the experiences were limited in terms of how they could be developed, particularly in relation to Pinch poke pull, Creepy crawly, I love shoes, Ha, ha this a way:

The children did not really enjoy using the clay as they were mostly used to play dough. We found it difficult to keep the children interested.

We found Creepy crawly difficult to carry out on a daily basis, although the children do have access to tents and tunnels.

Shoes were hard to obtain and it was hard to know what to suggest doing with them.

...the children enjoyed cutting it (the clay in pinch poke, pull) and feeling the different texture. When water was added not all the children enjoyed the clay.

They loved the shoes but they didn't take to it as much as I thought they would have took (sic) to it. You always get the odd child who loved the shoes and wore them about but they got bored with it quickly.

The one I would say that they didn't really take to was Ha, ha this a way. They got bored a lot easier with that one.

- Lack of space available both indoors and outdoors. This meant that sometimes only outdoor space was available for some of the movement experiences. Given the unpredictable nature of the Northern Irish weather and the fact that the programme ran from the autumn to the summer, much of the weather was wet and cold. The opportunities to carry out some of the movement experiences were, therefore, greatly reduced:

  > [Climbing and clambering] was created outside in the garden. The children already have knowledge of this activity as it is something we carried out before.

  > [The builder's yard] was mainly carried out in the garden depending on the weather.

  > Space was a bit of a problem (for Stepping stones)…and especially when you just want to lay it (the movement experiences) out on those big platforms. Space is a big thing. You have to pack away some stuff to get some stuff out. You can't put everything out together.

- Lack of clarity about their role or finding that their role in implementing the EAL programme required a very different approach to how they had been trained and worked previously:

  > I was in the habit of interacting with them. To sit back and go right what are we going to do with this jigsaw (is hard)… when you sit back and watch them you think you aren't doing anything. It was hard to step back… you were trained to do the opposite…

  > …at the clusters they were saying about letting the children do everything… I found that hard because when you have received your training you're told to interact with the children but in this programme they are saying to take a step-back approach and let the children take it on themselves. That is what I got from and I just found I didn't know what to do…you are observing all day and you feel you are not working. You want to be more involved.

  > At the start it was very, very difficult for me to come down from nursery (school training). It was very difficult. When I came down it was hard and I was like what am I supposed to be doing?

- Difficulties implementing or misunderstanding EAL requirements regarding the accessibility of resources to children:

  > [The SEYS] has suggested to put some shoes in a window all day. We were talking about it and yes in an ideal world that can work but you have the kids fighting over it. She is here to make suggestions and we take on board what she says but it can't always be practical.

  > We didn't leave the clay out all day long just set adequate time throughout the day….

  > We were unable to leave the clay out for the children to access but if/when they requested it, it was given to them.

...sometimes it needs to be changed…. That would make it more interesting probably. It would make some children more aware that [the movement experiences and associated resources] are there. Sometimes I think with the shoes, if they are in the dress up closet at the bottom they might not be aware of them being there, so maybe setting them in a different way.

- Practitioners feeling unsupported by management:

  ...at the start it was very hard to get our manager on board…as she was not helping with buying items and equipment we needed.

  Lack of support from the owner/manager… meant difficulty accessing recommended resources and implementing certain activities.

The qualitative data generated from the SEYS survey also identified a range of barriers to effective implementation of the movement experiences, some of which substantiate the barriers identified by practitioners. Specifically the following barriers were identified:

- Lack of adequate and appropriate management support provided to practitioners:

  ...The manager whilst she was very interested and enthusiastic about the EAL programme did not have the time or the continual commitment to support the two young members of staff who would have needed continual guidance.

- Not acting fully on the advice of the SEYS, in terms of utilising the environment to its fullest potential and using observation and planning to enhance their work with children:

  They did make some welcome changes to their indoor environment but could have developed outdoors.

  The practitioners only partially adopted observation and planning systems advised on the training…

- Practitioners being too directive and not facilitating child-led play:

  The implementation of the programme tended to be adult directed and setup at intervals during the day.

  Staff were slow to implement the programme and only provided it at certain periods of the day instead delivering an adult directed/focused programme.

Home learning package

As specified in chapter one of this report, the home learning package of the EAL programme includes a series of home visits carried out by practitioners, a parental workshop facilitated by an SEYS and the provision of a home learning manual and resource pack for parents to support them in carrying out developmental play activities in the home.

This section of the report explores the study findings regarding implementation of each of these. Data on the home visits was collected from practitioners in the third wave of practitioner surveys. Data on all elements of the home learning package were collected from parents as part of the outcomes questionnaire administered in June 2010.

Implementation statements and survey questions

Practitioner questionnaire

A series of nine statements regarding implementation of the home visits were included in the questionnaire and covered the following issues:

- The extent to which practitioners felt home visits were an essential part of the programme
- The perceived enthusiasm of parents towards the home visits
- The extent to which home visits were perceived to have helped parents understand EAL
- The ease of arranging home visits
- The extent to which practitioners felt comfortable carrying out the home visits
- The extent to which it was perceived that parents benefited from the home visits
- The impact of the home visits on the skills and confidence of practitioners
- The appropriateness of the number of visits required

In addition, practitioners were asked to rate the overall implementation of the home visits.

Parental questionnaire

In the parental questionnaire parents were asked to rate how useful the workshop, the home visits, the home learning manual and the resource pack were in terms of supporting the implementation of developmental play activities in the home. In addition parents were asked to indicate which home learning activities they completed with their children and to rate how well these went.

Findings from the quantitative data - practitioners

Given the nine statements above, the maximum score that could be achieved for implementation of the home visits was 45 and the minimum was nine. The overall distribution of implementation scores is shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11: The distribution of home visit implementation scores

Score category	Score range	Number of settings
Very low	9-16	
Low	17-23	2
Medium	24-30	6
High	31-37	13
Very high	38-45	3
Total		**24[7]**

As can be seen from Table 11, the implementation scores for the home visits of the EAL programme are slightly more mixed than the scores for the other components of EAL, though the majority of settings still achieved high or very high scores (16 of the 24 settings that conducted home visits).

[7] 3 settings did not carry out home visits and one setting did not complete this section of the Wave 3 questionnaire

Practitioners in the higher scoring settings identified the following aspects of the home visits as being particularly positive influences on implementation: the enthusiasm of parents towards the visits, the ease with which visits were arranged and the impact the visits had on parents' understanding of the programme.

Practitioners from lower scoring settings reported encountering difficulties in arranging the visits and tended to have more mixed levels of enthusiasm for the visits from parents. These settings were also less positive in their responses regarding the essential role the home visits play in the EAL programme and the perceived benefits to parents of the visits.

However, one thing that there was broad agreement on across all settings was that parents would not like any more visits.

Practitioner ratings of overall implementation of the home visits were very positive. As Figure 6 below shows, almost all settings (96%) indicated that the home visits went well, with the majority stating that they went very well (61%).

Figure 6: Overall implementation of home visits
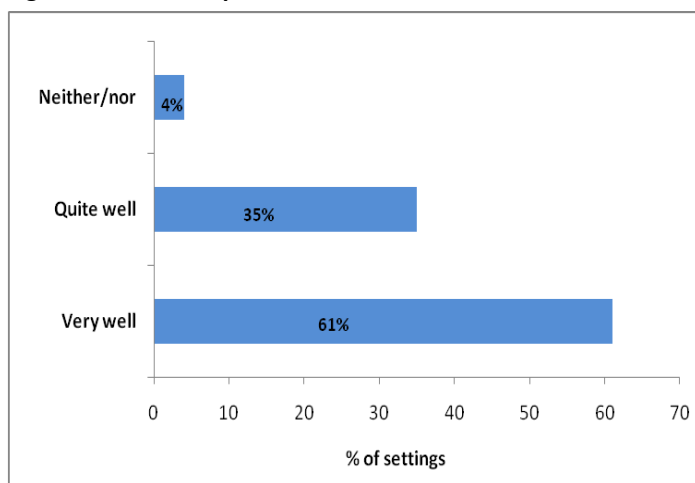
Findings from the qualitative data - practitioners

The interviews and open ended questions in the practitioner survey generated a range of qualitative data regarding implementation of the home visits. A summary of the analysis of this data is presented in the following sections.

In general the qualitative findings reflect the slightly more mixed picture shown in the implementation data in Table 11 above. Practitioners in the settings with high implementation scores for home visits identified a number of factors that contributed to this, including:

- The strengthened relationships between practitioners and parents and between practitioners and children as a result of the visits:

   It provided us as practitioners [with an opportunity] to have a stronger bond with the parents and children. We now feel they have a much open relationship with us. We really enjoyed doing them…

It gave the practitioner and parents an opportunity to discuss the programme, talk about any issues that may have developed during the EAL programme. We also feel that the relationship between child and practitioner changed in that it seemed to be a little bit stronger.

It gave us a proper chance to catch up with parents/carers instead of them just picking up the child and not really having time to speak. They were able to ask questions about things they normally wouldn't have. And it gave us a real bond with the children individually because they had seen us at their house and not just at nursery.

- Gaining a more complete understanding of the child in his or her own home environment:

Got to know parents and children in the home setting. Better understanding of how things work at home and can bring this into the setting.

We were able to see the children relaxed and (were) at ease in their home environment. Gave us an insight into how the children behave at home.

We learnt a lot about the children and observed how their behaviour is different at home than in the setting.

- The enthusiasm and excitement shown by children at having the practitioner visit them at home:

The children were so excited about me visiting them at their home.

The kids bring you in as they know you from nursery and once they recognise you they're like I know who you are. They are like come and play with me. They love the one- to-one [interaction].

- Practitioners' ability to put parents at their ease during the visits:

I think sometimes the parents think you are checking up on them…. You sort of have to allay their fears. They're like I do this and I do this, so its building that relationship. It's saying listen I'm here to help you not to see what you are doing.

Some of them were panicking as they weren't doing the experiences at home as they were like I can't get it done every day. I said calm down it could be water play at bath time as simple as that. It was a good chance to chat. We never really do home visits in here outside of this programme so it was good to start to build up a relationship with the parent.

However in more than a third of settings, the home visits were cited as the most challenging aspect of the EAL programme. The main challenges identified were:

- Mixed reactions and engagement levels from parents which at times persisted throughout all visits:

… some of the parents felt it was a waste of time.

Some parents didn't want home visits carried out.

Some (visits) were ok and some were not. I went to one house and there wasn't even the child there. Even though they were told the child needed to be there as we would be doing a wee activity with them.

I don't think the parents realised that there would be just as many visits. We did mention to them that there would be another one coming up and they said 'oh again?' That was maybe our own fault as we weren't sure ourselves how many home visits we would have to do…I think there is too many.

There have been two extremes. Some have been really keen and eager for you to come out to their house. Then there are other ones who aren't interested they keep putting it off and putting it off. They've been avoiding me and [saying] 'I can't see you this week I'll see you next week'… It's trying to get them and you don't want to push them.

- Practitioners feeling uncomfortable or not confident in visiting children's homes:

  They (parents) are fine coming in here leaving their children in but when it comes to staff going to their house it is a totally different thing altogether. I know how I would feel if there were three members of staff coming to my house. You would be anxious about it.

  Our first round was in the winter time and the dark evenings. You don't like going knocking on people's doors… I found it more comfortable during the day doing it.

  I think because you are going into their home you feel a bit uncomfortable… I was just a bit nervous as I have never done it before and didn't know what to expect.

  There are parents who are not comfortable with me [coming to their house] - you feel that you are invading their personal space….They don't see us as educators they see us as somebody who changes the nappy and puts [the child] to sleep. That's all they really want.

- Timing issues and the number of home visits that were required to be conducted:

  …we were unable to complete the third [set of] home visits due to time restrictions.

  [There were] too many [visits]. We thought two home visits were plenty as parents already have a home visit before [the Sure Start] programme starts. Home learning experiences can be carried out in the setting or during workshops.

  Working in day care we found it difficult to encourage parents to have home visits. Parents said they were out working all day by the time they got home as late as 6.30pm they still had to make dinner, bath their children and then it was bedtime.

  …the time scale we had to do them [was an issue] as we are open till 6pm each night and with children going to bed. Couldn't go during the day as parents were working (questionnaire).

- The location of the child's home, distance from the setting and logistics of getting there:

> Where some of them live (has been difficult). There are ones that live about an hour away from me. It's getting out of here and going there and then coming home…I live half an hour away from here in the opposite direction from where the parents live. They live the other side. That's been really hard the journey.

> It would have been better if I had a car…

Suggestions for improving the home visits

During interviews practitioners were asked how the home visiting element of the programme might be improved. Suggestions tended to focus on the need for more explicit communication with parents from Early Years in order to explain the purpose of the home visits and what precisely they entailed:

> I think maybe if there was something like a letter to explain to the parents that we are not there to inspect them we're there to help them. If they knew that from the start when you are signing them up to the programme. If the home visits were explained a bit better to them so they understand why we are there.

> I think if it was coming from (Early Years) rather than us…if there was a letter to explain what our aim is and part of the programme is to have home visits.

> Just a bit to say in home visits we will be doing wee experiences, it is your chance and they are not there to check up on you.

Other less commonly identified suggestions included the following:

- Practitioners getting time off work to carry out home visits
- Having less visits as three was perceived too many
- Using role play and practical examples of issues/situations during training to help practitioners implement the visits
- Carrying out a home visit before children start the programme
- Encouraging both parents to be present during visits where possible

Findings from the quantitative data - parents

Figure 7 overleaf shows parental ratings regarding the usefulness of all elements of the home learning package. As the chart indicates, ratings were high across the board with a substantial majority of parents rating the visits, manual, resource pack and workshop as useful.

Figure 7: Usefulness of the home learning package (parent ratings)
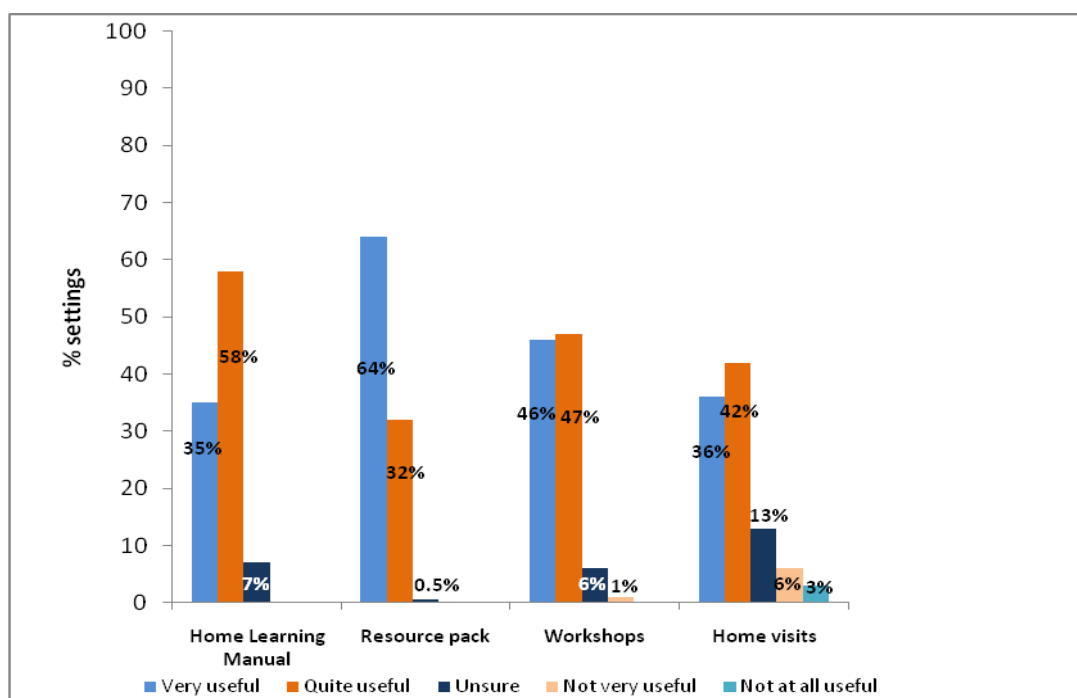
Given these results it is not surprising that parents reported a high level of engagement in the home learning activities, where on average parents implemented six out of the eight activities suggested in the manual. In addition, almost all parents (99%) felt that the home learning activities went well.

Findings from the qualitative data – parents

The home visits

Like practitioners, parents also reported a mix of both positive and negative feedback regarding the home visits. Positive feedback tended to centre on:

- The visits enabling greater parental understanding of the programme's rationale and aims:

    [The visits] emphasised to me the programme goals.

    [The practitioner] was very well informed, explained why the experiences aided development, suggested ideas to help [my child] in various areas.

     [The practitioners] clarified any questions about the programme in a relaxed and informal setting.

- Seeing first hand during the visits how their child could benefit from the programme:

    At the first visit my child was a bit shy and unsure to see his nursery teachers/carers here. On the second visit he was more relaxed and happily joined in the activity. It was good to see him interacting so well.

    I got to ask advice about my child and got to see each visit how much he had advanced and got better doing activities.

- The opportunity visits provided for having increased contact with practitioners:

  > As x's father never gets the opportunity to pick her up from nursery it allowed him to make contact with a different member of staff.

  > They informed me how my child was getting on in crèche – more information than I would get informally on a day-to-day basis.

- The opportunity visits provided for practitioners to see the child in the home environment and for parents to see the dynamics between the staff and children:

  > They were also useful in the sense that it allowed staff to see [my child] in her own environment.

  > It also helped for the staff to see [my child] in his own home environment and what he was able to do at home.

  > [The home visits] allowed me to see the child's reaction to staff and how easily they interacted.

In terms of negative feedback from parents, the most common issues raised were:

- Uncertainty about the aims of the home visits and for some parents feeling that they were being monitored :

  > Difficult to tell what the purpose was – monitoring or further encouragement?

  > I didn't see the relevance or necessity.

- Feeling that the home visits did not add anything to the EAL experience either for themselves or their child and that they already had sufficient communication with practitioners:

  > I know what my children does in nursery i.e. activities, learning, singing, taking part, baking, playing and don't believe the visits added any value. I speak daily to staff and any issues are addressed.

  > I can talk easily with the girls in the nursery premises.

- Feeling that the home visits were of less benefit to them as parents and perhaps of more benefit to practitioners:

  > I thought it was more beneficial for the staff to see [my child] in his home environment.

The comments from both practitioners and parents above demonstrate some of the very real challenges facing practitioners in implementing the home visits and reinforce both the need for clear communication to parents about the purpose of the home visits and the importance of the role played by practitioners.

The home learning manual

Many parents felt that the home learning manual provided them with a wealth of information and ideas about the activities that they could do with their children, which was also reflected in the high number of home learning activities actually conducted. One parent felt it was particularly helpful in encouraging fathers to play with their children more whilst several parents specifically mentioned the following:

- How the manual acted as a reminder to parents about the importance and joy of playing with their children:

  The songs and activities were great. It was stuff you had forgotten about.

  This showed me as a mother how to play and do certain activities with my child in a way I had never thought in games, structured play etc.

  Gave me plenty of ideas how I should involve the girls in play and how much they learn from these simple things.

  It was a really helpful manual that shows the importance of parental involvement in child development.

- How the manual served as a good reminder of the purpose of EAL and the content of the workshop:

  Helped to refresh my understanding of the programme and the different elements of play.

  Hard to remember everything discussed at workshop, good to have manual to refer back to.

  Excellent guide to the programme and a reminder of daily activities recommended.

- How the manual was user-friendly and easy to read and understand:

  Manual was easy to understand and gave new songs and rhymes to use when playing.

  It was laid out clearly and all the experiences were explained clearly.

  Lots of useful information that was easy to understand. Showed how a little basic play can teach so much, e.g. one to one play is better than expensive toys.

  It was laid out in such a way that you didn't have to read the whole book - just dip in.

- How the advice in the manual helped with parenting skills, particularly in resolving issues that were causing conflict with their child:

  Gave reasons to why children do things that I previously thought was bad behaviour.

It showed different ways of approaching situations.

It demonstrated different ways to communicate and have fun with our kids.

- How the manual acted as reassurance for parents who were already engaged a lot in play activities with their child:

    Interesting ideas and yet reassuring because I was doing a lot of the activities.

    I was able to use the manual to reassure me of things that I was doing. A great guide.

- How the manual enabled parents to extend and develop play activities that they were already engaging in with their children:

    A lot of the activities and ideas within the manual are already applied to [my child] although there were a few that I had not thought of.

    Used it to log activities and try new ideas. Several we had done before but appreciated new suggestions and enjoyed them thoroughly.

Some parents admitted that they had not actually used the manual enough to make a judgement on its usefulness. The few parents who made negative comments about the manual focussed on:

- There being 'nothing new' in the manual:

    I read it but I suppose there wasn't anything in it which I didn't know about.

- The manual being too long:

    Information very good but would be more user-friendly if shorter or more condensed.

    It provides a good source of information and ideas but is a little lengthy.

The resource pack

The vast majority of parents were very positive about the resources and the associated activities undertaken using them. A wide range of comments were made, including:

- How the pack encouraged quality time between parents and children and helped to engage other siblings:

    ...you could also include the rest of the children to come and join in with making the dough etc

    ... I found my child enjoying the play and the time we had together

- The simplicity of the resources and the amount of fun they provided, which at times surprised parents:

Child made great use of everything. The materials have taken all sorts of play uses. [I] wouldn't have believed it. Even the pack bag is in use.

I wouldn't have thought how much fun they could have with simple things especially hideaway with the curtain.

Pack contained very ordinary items but was a stimulus for extraordinary fun!

We have so much fun with all the items and shows spending so little can result in great play.

- How having the pack increased the likelihood and the extent to which parents engaged in the activities with their children:

…all the materials I need were there so no excuses.

It saved me having to get the items as it's busy in the evenings after work.

Showed me some activities I could do with my child and all things were there so didn't have to go buy anything.

- How the resources appeared to stimulate children's imagination:

Had and still do have such fun with it all. I've been rescued from our blue sheet (sea!) in our house so many times!!

He loved the net curtain and has had such imaginative play with it.

Very similar to what used in creche, child enjoyed using them and showing me different uses and good for imagination.

- How the pack eliminated parents' health and safety fears:

Allowed me to let the boys get on with making dough with plastic bowls and not worry about them breaking things and hurting themselves.

- How it was useful in reinforcing what was already happening in the settings with their children:

It gives you the option to do the same play as they do in nursery…

Fantastic to have everything at home - keep consistency with play at nursery.

The SEYS support

Data on the SEYS support was collected across all three waves of the practitioner surveys as this is an on-going element throughout the programme.

Implementation statements and survey questions

A series of five statements were included in each wave of the practitioners' questionnaires and covered the following:

- The adequacy of the amount of support provided
- The extent to which the SEYS modelled good practice
- The adequacy of the SEYS response to issues identified by practitioners
- The usefulness of the support
- The extent to which the SEYS support facilitated reflection on practice

Practitioners were also asked to rate the overall quality of the support offered from the SEYS across all three waves of the research.

Implementation scores and ratings

Given the five statements asked across the three waves of survey, the total maximum score achievable was 75 and the minimum was 15 and the higher the score, the more positive the implementation process of SEYS support. The overall distribution of scores awarded by settings is shown in Table 12.

**Table 12: The distribution of SEYS support implementation scores**

Score category	Scores within range	Number of settings
Very low	15-27	
Low	28-40	
Medium	41-53	
High	54-66	6
Very high	67-75	22
Total		**28**

As can be seen from Table 12, all of the settings rated the SEYS support either highly or very highly. Furthermore, a quarter of settings awarded the maximum score of 75 and the lowest score awarded by a setting was 60. Practitioners specifically identified the following aspects of the SEYS support as being particularly beneficial:

- The amount of support available
- The response of the SEYS to the issues raised by practitioners
- The fact that the SEYS support facilitated reflective practice, which for many was key to their learning

Not surprisingly the above results are confirmed in practitioners' overall quality ratings of SEYS support throughout the year. As Figure 8 below illustrates, across the three waves of surveys, the significant majority of practitioners rated SEYS support as being very good.

Figure 8: SEYS support ratings across all three waves of the research
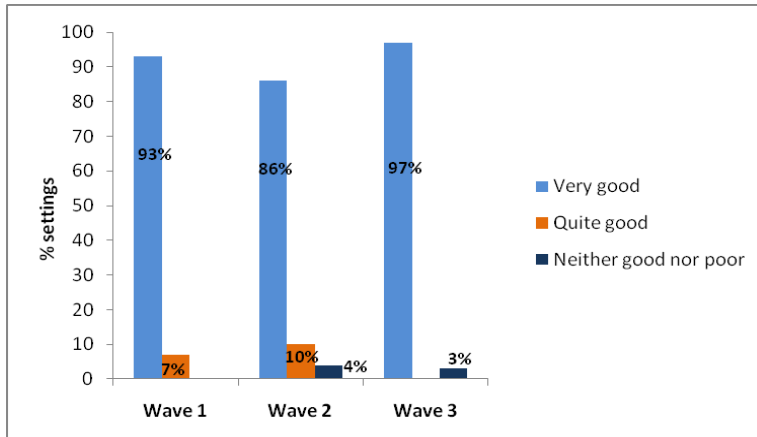
In addition, practitioners from half of the settings (14 of the 28 settings) specified that the SEYS support was what helped them the most to implement the EAL programme.

Findings from the qualitative data

In the qualitative interviews practitioners also spoke very positively about the SEYS support. Particular strengths of the SEYS support identified were the following:

- SEYS' taking time to work through problematic areas of programme implementation with the practitioners:

  There was a stage where we didn't have a clue about our observations. It was new. We had done it a completely different way from them so trying to grasp it [was difficult]. [The SEYS] sat down with us and explained everything, how you do it… now we are flying through them…There is less to write in these new ones...Less writing but you are actually getting more out of it than what we were in our old way.

  She was able to advise us on the set up of the room. She was able to advise us when we were actually doing some of the developmental things. She was able to advise us on how to implement it better.

  She was supportive when we were going on the home visits as we were a bit concerned about doing them. She helped us a lot.

- The constant encouragement provided by the SEYS and how this motivated practitioners:

  We were given a lot of praise for good practice.

  [The SEYS] was always available for advice and encouragement when it was needed. Assured us that what we were doing was sufficient.

- The flexibility and availability of the SEYS:

  If we have any problems we have her number we can just phone her at any time or email her…She emails us a lot.

> She is always on the phone and we can ask to call and she would make a date in her diary to call with us. She always says if we are stuck on anything she is there.

In a few settings, however, there were some specific issues identified by practitioners in relation to the SEYS support which are important to note. These were:

- When a different SEYS than the specific one allocated facilitated a parent workshop, the practitioners felt the SEYS was not as supportive as they should have been:

> We found X's support quite poor because on our parents night it was the staff who praised the parents and supported them when two parents said 'we feel like bad mums' and had felt they had learnt nothing new from that night as they were aware the nursery had already been doing all that the Early Years Advisor has said their children need…We, the staff felt the Early Years Advisor missed the opportunity to support these parents, as they are all working mothers and trying their best.

- Receiving conflicting information from two different SEYS, one of whom was advising a setting on the EAL programme and the other on All-Ireland Accreditation. Specific conflicts of advice mentioned were in relation to room layout, decor and the appropriateness of the EAL programme being implemented in a pre-school room. This was confusing for practitioners and they felt it placed further stress on them.

> I did what [the other practitioner in the 2-3 year old room] was doing and that was ok for [her] to be doing that. To come into my room for the 3-5 year olds it had to be adjusted but I wasn't aware of that… our advisor had come in and didn't like that it was in our room but [the EAL SEYS] was like 'it had to be in here as the children are in here'. I was left and was 'like I don't want to do this course anymore' as I had put so much into this room and now it isn't the right way.

- The lack of knowledge and understanding of EAL by inspecting social services officials who expected to see the room laid out in a particular way or the work with children to be conducted in a way that was contrary to how practitioners were advised to work by SEYS' in delivering the EAL programme:

> We had taken the topic board down and Social Services came in and were like why is that board empty? … they liked the planning and the introduction of the home corner but she missed the boards…I think the programme needs to be targeted at what you have been trained in. Social services have to be trained in it first.

> It's the routine [that] we had lots of problems with… we had to ask [the SEYS] a couple of times trying to get it changed… We were trying to balance…what social services want and what we could implement in the [EAL] plan. So the routine was quite difficult to get to that freedom stage.

Some practitioners suggested ways in which the SEYS support might be improved and interestingly all suggestions pointed towards a desire for more support. Specific areas identified were:

- More information and advice on the role of the practitioner in programme implementation and what is expected of them
- Support to be continued into the following year of implementation

- More support visits throughout the implementation period
- More advice on how to facilitate implementation when children move rooms – both out of and into the room where the majority of two-to-three-year-olds are
- More communication with social services and regulation authorities so they know what changes are going to be made in the settings and so that they can understand and appreciate the rationale behind EAL programme
- More support for daycare settings who operate year round on what to do once they reach the end of the programme in June (i.e. over the summer months)

Support from management

Data on the support provided by setting management[8] was collected in the second wave of practitioner surveys and in depth interviews with practitioners. Towards the end of the programme's implementation, SEYS were also asked to rate the level of engagement from management in settings.

Survey and interview questions

In the survey practitioners were asked to rate the level of management support and to provide reasons for their ratings. In the depth interviews these ratings were explored further and practitioners were asked to discuss how management had supported the programme and how this support might be enhanced.

The SEYS were asked to rate the level of engagement of management on a five point scale using definitions supplied by the research team (these are included in the sample SEYS questionnaire in the appendix booklet).

Implementation scores and ratings

Practitioner ratings of management support were largely positive with almost two thirds (65%) indicating that their managers supported the implementation of EAL very well and a further 14% (four settings) felt that they were quite well supported. However, the chart shows that four settings also felt quite poorly supported.

Figure 9: Practitioner ratings of management support

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[8] Management here refers to the day care mangers/owners and Sure Start coordinators as well as management committees where relevant.
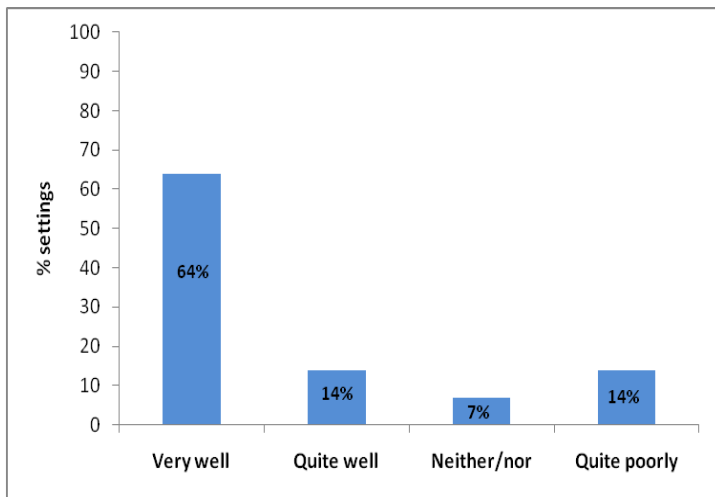
As the chart below shows, the SEYS' also perceived there to be high levels of management engagement in the programme – 79% of settings deemed to be either 'very' or 'quite' engaged. In five settings (18%), SEYS reported having had insufficient contact with management to rate the level of engagement.

Figure 10: SEYS perspectives on management engagement in EAL
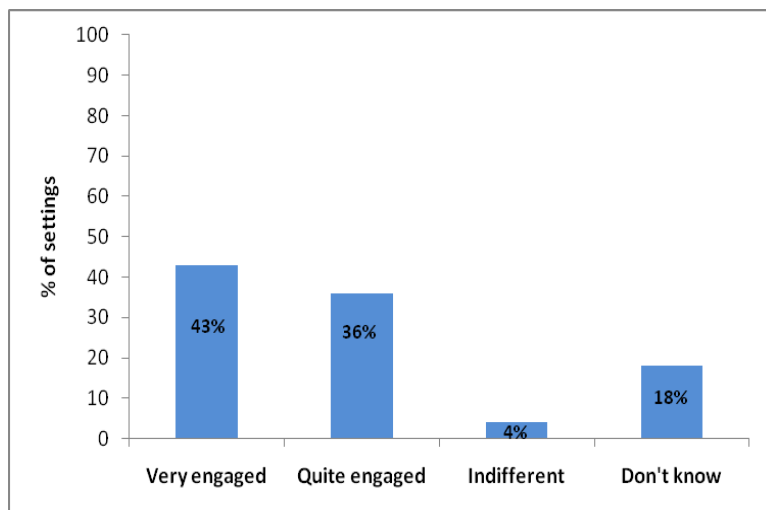
Findings from the qualitative data

In general the qualitative findings support the quantitative data outlined above as practitioners generally spoke positively about the level of support they received from management.

In settings where practitioners felt well supported by management, they tended to comment specifically on:

- Management participating in the programme training:

  Both have been on the training and it's been very useful for them to hear everything properly from an SEYS so they understand better.

Our manager…did the course and our boss did the course. I think that was probably to our advantage they actually got to see firsthand. We didn't have to come back and feedback to them. She did see that we needed things.

…She went to one or two days of the training… She was very aware of what we were implementing…We are lucky our coordinator is coming from a preschool background she's very into children's learning and children's development.

- Management being open to new ideas:

  She's a new coordinator and she's very open to new things and wants to provide quality programmes...

  Senior management within our organisation are open to new ideas and supportive of the programme.

  Very supportive of change and better ideas for the rooms.

- Management committing to any extra resources practitioners needed:

  I feel like I can ask for anything I may need e.g. material, advice etc.

  If we needed extra staff, if we needed the resources, she was very ready.

  Management has worked very closely with us as any resources we needed to change the layout of our room was provided.

- Management encouraging staff autonomy:

  Allows us to make changes that work well with the programme.

  Support has been given with no interference.

  She has given me the authority to say on the planning day 'no they're not going to cover somewhere else'.

- Management engaging practitioners in teamwork to support implementation:

  We all sat down and had a meeting. We talked about what we needed and how to implement the programme. It was a clean sheet.

  We have had team meetings around the programme and it's given the two groups [an opportunity] to discuss what is happening, share ideas and if someone is not as confident implementing some things we support each other.

Practitioners who did not feel very well supported by management identified a number of reasons for this, including:

- Management not understanding EAL and what it required:

  Got us new resources to improve our room to help with the programme but was quite slow in getting them. Some management not trained so found it hard to understand.

  Feel that management don't know the facts about the programme.

  Haven't taken the time to find out therefore can't give support on something they know nothing about.

- Management not providing cover to enable attendance at home visits and training:

  Due to demand and staffing my manager has tried her best in getting me out but sometimes this has not been possible. The only thing is we have never had the experience to do home visits so at the minute this is an issue and the reason I have not yet done a home visit.

  …we never get the time to go on home visits… She would also never be in the setting at times when you need support always very busy.

- Management being removed from the programme/day to day operation of the setting (in the case of some Sure Start settings this was thought to be due to management being located in a different building)

  Management in my setting doesn't really bother much about the programme.

  It's just us three girls in the crèche that has been doing it. But we can go to a supervisor if we need anything.

  Manager not involved on a daily basis regarding the running of setting.

  [The coordinator] doesn't really know an awful lot about the programme...Just left to do it ourselves and never asks how it is going.

Suggestions for improving management support

During interviews practitioners were asked if they had any suggestions as to how support from setting management could be improved. Several suggestions were made and those most commonly identified included:

- Management undertaking EAL training:

  [The manager] doing the course…as she doesn't get it. We asked for bricks and stuff for the garden and she was like 'they will hurt themselves'…I think if she went to the training she would have understood.

  …the committee... maybe they should go on the training.

… A lot of the owner managers went to the training but ours was too busy. I think that would have made a big difference.

- Management facilitating the use of more natural resources and other materials:

  A lot of [other practitioners] were saying that they visit play resource warehouses. The owner-manager should be getting us to go and get new resources and providing different things that the children can do. We didn't get the opportunity to do that either…We talked about doing it but it never happened.

- Management visiting the setting and rooms during implementation:

  They could come round and we could give them feedback on what we are doing and this is why we are doing.

  If they (management committees) came up and asked more questions about how it was going… Or any equipment we need for the activities…Perhaps one of them could come to one of the cluster groups to see how things were done.

Interestingly, some of those practitioners interviewed were also managers, who having participated in the training felt that they had a thorough understanding of the programme which in turn had a significant impact on the levels of support they provided throughout the year to facilitate implementation:

> … I am the management and I carried out the training and senior room leader was excellent at carrying it out with her staff.

> As manager I have attended training and worked alongside supervisor and have full participation in programme

> I went on the training to ensure that if the girls came up and needed something I would know why. We were setting out in the whole curriculum training anyway and I wanted to be as informed as I could be with how it could fit into the bigger picture of the unit. The girls could be facilitated to do that.

Overall impact of the EAL programme on practitioners

Having discussed implementation of each of the programme's components, the final stages of practitioner interviews were used to explore the perceived impact of the programme on practice.

On the whole, whilst many practitioners commented on the challenges they faced due to the programme requiring a new approach to their work, many also felt that they had learned a great deal and that their practice with two-to-three-year-olds had improved as a result of participating in the programme. The key areas of development identified were:

- Changing the environment to be more appropriate for two year olds:

  …you realise how good the homeliness is for the room… It's good for the children because they enjoy it. They enjoy turning the lights off and having the lamps on and chilling out… Before it was just like a preschool room. Now it looks more homely

and right for that age group. You see now when you have the homely lamps and curtains up it's beautiful, it makes you feel at home. It has sort of calmed them down a bit as well.

We would have had a lot of tables in these rooms and they are great for the older children. But the age that these children are there is (sic) too much table activities. They need to really move and to play more than to sit down and work.

We had a watered down version of preschool. Now it is much more at their level and activities which they are engaging in and developing, especially the developmental movement area. We needed it in the room. The children... not that we thought they were misbehaving - they seemed much more boisterous. They weren't channelling that energy. Now there is an area in the room for them to do that.

We've really had to step back and look at our environment and reduce it down to minimise what we have put in. We didn't think we had too much but we had too much and it was more of a distraction at that age. Its made us sit back and look at our natural materials and curiosity boxes…The movement area cuts down in arguments as it is there permanently and they can come and go…They will decide on the layout. We put the materials out and they decide where they want it.

- Viewing two-year-olds as more competent, confident, independent people:

  We are giving them more independence. We let them measure out their own cups of flour and stir their own. We even started using vegetable soup. They are cutting up their own veg and putting it into their own bowl…They are pouring out their own water at toast time... They pick their own toast up for their plate and their own fruit. It's opened up to allow them to be more independent.

  I would think about them much differently now. Before I mainly worked with older kids so I was used to being able to talk back and have conversations. Two-year-olds are viewed as they are only beginning to learn to talk and they can't do that much. Probably my whole image of how much the two-year-old can actually do and how they think has changed.

  I am amazed how you can change their whole behaviour by making them more responsible. You can actually reason with them. It's amazing how it works all round. If you give them more choice and a bit more responsibility they are more willing to work with you more.

  …you can actually see they have become much more confident and active and concentration is very good. Their fine and gross motor skills are very well developed. Even their independence at snack and things like that. From when they first came they were quite scared and clingy.

  They are using knives and forks. If you had said to me a year ago I'd be allowing a child knives and forks… I find our children are more capable of doing things... They are not using beakers anymore. We were nearly spoon feeding them with beakers with wee lids. They have that independence and they are confident.

- Recognising the importance and benefit of facilitating free choice for children:

  It just seems to be more relaxed…The children do what they want. If they want to paint they just go and you're not having to say watch, watch, watch. You just let them go on ahead and experience things themselves. Once you do the activity once with them it would be set out so it would always be there so if they want to play with it they go back. It's far more relaxed. The children seem more relaxed too. They are communicating more with each other. Taking turns.

  I am giving them more of a choice and more of an area for them to experience that. We were used to setting everything out for them for when they would come in. Now it is wherever they choose. It's good to see that they chose to make the hut or build a big castle. Rather than adult led it is child-led now.

  There is less structure. You don't feel you are telling the children what to do. It's their choice and they are able to do it. They are enjoying the play and they are having fun.

  There is much more freedom. It's given children the choice. Because we have clearly defined areas they can go…You can give the choice and say what you would like to play with or what would you like to do. They can tell you.

- Increasing and improving interactions with children:

  You're more involved with the children. Rather than me sitting here and saying 'ok everybody let's make Valentines cards', I find myself going to a child to find out what they are doing. It's been a positive experience for me as I find that I have changed how I would have directed children… I definitely have a more open relationship with the children. There's a lot more talking. Maybe go as far to say I have a lot more respect for them and what they want to do.

  ..before we were constantly setting limits. It got to the stage when I came in and felt I was telling the children all day no...You were constantly saying no. You can't climb on that… Now instead of saying no you are saying well if you want to climb, climb on our climbing frame or why don't we try it this way. You are compromising with them and the children are easier to compromise with…They have calmed down a lot because they were maybe frustrated before… [now]there is (sic)no limitations for them.. there is less conflict.

- More able to meet individual children's needs:

  I'm more planning for the individual child…I have more insight and more knowledge about planning for the individual child's needs. We are trying more to ask the children what they want to do.

  …I find that I tune in much better to the children individually.

  It makes you focus on the individual child rather than as a group.

- Being less risk adverse:

> I know before we started it was like 'watch when you are going up that slide'. When we got the slide there was no side bars to it and I was like 'oh my God'. After a while we let them explore. Let them test the water. I was like 'we can't let that out as they would fall off it' so it was learning that they will know what they are capable of... It has made me more aware that everything can be fun and you don't have to put it away because it is dangerous. They are great on the slide even though there are no barriers.

> Whatever it is that they are doing before I would have said you can't do that but now I would let them take risks in a supervised way.

For many practitioners, the new approaches learned were both refreshing and motivating, particularly for those who had been in practice for many years:

> It has stretched my learning. When you have been working for so long you get into a wee routine. For me I'm now 'what can we do to make this better? What can we get out of that?' - rather than it just being what it is.

> I have done one thing for so long and now there is a complete other way of working.

> I have done this for 10 years and this is the first ever course I have done on two-year-year-olds. …its getting away from what you were taught in level three what you should be doing and what you shouldn't be doing.

It is clear from the above findings that practitioners felt the EAL programme to have had a positive impact in terms of both learning and putting this into practice. Perhaps this impact is best summarised in the following quote:

> When we started to do this we thought it was going to be very hard to implement all of this. Now I'm sitting thinking we could never go back to the other way. It changes your whole way of thinking.

Summary

The findings presented in this chapter have highlighted the very positive implementation processes and experiences of all stakeholders regarding each of the programme's core components. Taking the programme components in turn, the following sections summarise the key findings in terms of enablers and inhibitors of effective implementation of each.

Initial and cluster training sessions

Enabling factors

- **Delivery style:** practitioners consistently indicated that the delivery style of the SEYS trainers was engaging and that they demonstrated expertise and passion in working with young children. This inspired practitioner confidence and enthusiasm for delivering the programme.

- **Content**: practitioners felt that the content of both the initial and cluster group training sessions were well balanced between theory and practice and enabled both a full appreciation of the programme's rationale and improved practice in working with two year olds.

- **Format:** the scheduling of initial training on a one day per week basis across six weeks, with cluster sessions then delivered throughout the year, allowed time for new learning to be absorbed and consolidated. Bringing a range of practitioners from different settings together at cluster sessions was of particular benefit as it afforded valuable opportunities for sharing experiences and identifying solutions to overcome any implementation difficulties.

Inhibiting factors

- **Imbalance of participants:** where sessions did not have an adequate balance of practitioners from the two setting types, i.e. Sure Start programmes and day care providers, this led to sessions being dominated by one type which proved intimidating for some practitioners.

- **Lack of attendance:** practitioners from some settings were not facilitated by management to attend all of the training sessions; this compromised their ability to implement the programme in full accordance with its design.

- **Insufficient content on home visits:** for practitioners, implementing the home visits was the most challenging aspect of the programme and one which they would have welcomed more focus on in training sessions.

The service design manual

Enabling factors

- **Content:** the manual's content equipped practitioners with a thorough understanding of the programme's rationale and acted as a valuable source of reference for implementing the programme throughout the year. Of particular benefit was the fan of possible learning for each movement experience which enabled practitioners to appreciate the potential

developmental gains for children, aided observations and planning and increased the importance and value practitioners placed on their role in working with young children.

- **Accessibility:** the layout and language used in the manual made it easy to understand and therefore well utilised by practitioners.

Inhibiting factors

- **Insufficient content on home visits:** practitioners felt that the manual did not have sufficient content in terms of practical advice on implementing this most challenging aspect of the programme.

- **Lack of time to use the manual properly:** several practitioners found it difficult to set aside enough time in their working schedules to fully read and digest the manual and felt that time to do this was not facilitated by setting management.

The developmental movement experiences

Enabling factors

- **Variety of experiences:** which led to high levels of engagement and enthusiasm among children

- **Skilled practitioners:**

  - ➢ Who could operate across a continuum of adult initiated/directed activity and child initiated activity, knowing when to intervene to extend children's play whilst also affording children the autonomy to develop this themselves
  - ➢ Who were able to maintain children's interest in the experiences, through encouraging them to explore all of the challenges and excitement the experiences presented
  - ➢ Who understood and fully bought into the ethos of the programme and the developmental gains offered by the movement experiences

- **Adequate space:** having the physical space in settings both indoors and outdoors to fully implement and develop all of the movement experiences

Inhibiting factors

- **Practitioners who were risk adverse:** where practitioners perceived there to be health and safety issues associated with some of the movement experiences, these experiences were either not implemented or not developed to their full potential.

- **Lack of space and time:** some settings had very limited indoor and/or outdoor space available to implement the experiences fully. In addition some of the Sure Start programmes found it difficult to implement the increasing number of movement experiences as the year progressed due to shorter operating hours.

- **Lack of management support:** in some cases practitioners felt that their managers did not adequately support them in implementing the experiences and attributed this to a lack of understanding of the programme or appreciation of its aims on the part of management.

- **Lack of understanding from inspection authorities:** some practitioners had to explain the rationale behind the EAL programme and the movement experiences to inspection and regulation staff who were unaware of the programme and who had questioned their practice.

- **Less confident/skilled practitioners:** in some settings practitioners indicated that they 'didn't know what to do' or found it 'difficult to hold the children's attention' when implementing some of the movement experiences. These tended to be the movement experiences which were less resource intensive and therefore required more imagination on the part of practitioners (such as This-way, that-a-way and I love shoes).

The home learning package

Enabling factors

- **Support from management:** home visits were more likely to have been completed when management supported their rationale and facilitated practitioners conducting them during the working day.

- **Enthusiastic parents:** the vast majority of parents welcomed the home visits and felt enthusiastic towards them, seeing them as benefiting the child, the practitioner and themselves. They felt the home visits enabled greater communication between themselves and the setting and greater understanding of children for practitioners through seeing them in their home environment.

- **Focusing on the benefits of the programme:** practitioners found that focusing initial conversations with parents on the benefits of the EAL programme got the home visiting process off to a stronger start as it helped to put parents at ease and allay any fears they had about the visits.

- **The resource pack, home learning manual and workshop:** each of these proved very useful to parents in terms of communicating and re-enforcing the programme's aims and in facilitating high levels of implementation of the home play activities. This in turn led to many positive experiences for both parents and children including parents overcoming their self-consciousness or lack of confidence and rediscovering the joy of play.

Inhibiting factors

- **Practitioner's lack of confidence:** for many practitioners, particularly those in day care settings, the concept of home visits was very new and they felt uncomfortable and lacking in confidence going into children's homes and engaging with parents. This compromised the content and success of visits.

- **Lack of support from management:** some practitioners felt that their managers could have done more to facilitate home visits. In one case home visits were prohibited by management due to 'contractual issues'.

- **Lack of time and logistical issues:** some settings had a relatively large number of children participating in the EAL programme and consequently a correspondingly large number of parents to visit over the three required occasions. Completing the visits, therefore proved to

be a significant challenge for these practitioners and even more so where there were large distances to travel to reach children's homes. Parents' work patterns also caused problems, particularly where parents worked full time.

- **Parents who were risk adverse or house proud:** like practitioners, some parents were also risk adverse or too 'house proud' to engage fully in the home play activities.

SEYS support

Enabling factors

- **Establishing and maintaining relationships with practitioners:** across the board, the SEYS established and maintained very effective working relationships with practitioners and indeed managers of the settings. Having this relationship meant that the SEYS was trusted and regarded as a critical friend by practitioners who spoke highly of the support they received throughout the year.

- **The acceptance of SEYS advice:** where practitioners and managers accepted the advice provided by the SEYS and acted upon it, there was better implementation of the programme than would have been the case otherwise.

- **The availability of the SEYS:** many practitioners really valued the fact that the SEYS went out of their way to be available to the practitioners, either in person, on the telephone or via email.

- **The SEYS being solution orientated:** whilst recognising that the implementation of a totally new programme is not without its challenges, the SEYS were reported as being solution orientated. This approach enabled the continuous motivation of practitioners throughout the year and also enabled practitioners to begin seeking out solutions for themselves when faced with implementation difficulties.

- **The SEYS providing bespoke support:** the SEYS' ability to recognise that each setting is unique in its context and tailor support and advice accordingly was particularly appreciated by practitioners.

Inhibiting factors

- **Expectations of authorities:** several settings struggled with the expectations of their inspecting authority which contrasted with the advice provided from the EAL SEYS.

- **Conflicting advice:** practitioners in one setting reported receiving conflicting advice from the SEYS who was supporting them in the EAL programme and another who was advising on implementation of a different initiative. Whilst this did only happen in one setting it is an important issue to report.

Management support

Enabling factors

- **Participating in the EAL training:** where management participated in the training, they acquired a good understanding of the programme and tended to provide better support to practitioners in implementing the programme.

- **Facilitating practitioner autonomy**: where managers allowed practitioners to make the decisions and have full autonomy over the implementation of the programme, this was empowering and motivating for the practitioner.

Inhibiting factors

- **Creating barriers to the programme's full implementation:** in a few settings practitioners felt that managers prevented full implementation of the programme taking place due to not providing cover to facilitate attendance at training, not allowing or facilitating home visits or not providing adequate time for planning. In some settings managers were also considered to have shown little or no interest in the programme, which was disheartening for the practitioners.

Impact of the EAL programme

Practitioners considered the programme to have had many positive impacts on them, most of which were focussed on enhancing their learning and practice in working with two-year-old children. This in turn was deemed to have resulted in better interactions and relationships with children and their parents and better understanding of children as competent and confident individuals.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

Using the key findings presented in previous chapters, this final chapter presents the conclusions that can be drawn regarding fidelity levels and implementation of the EAL programme's delivery in 2009/2010. The chapter also makes a number of recommendations that should be made to the programme if fidelity levels and implemented processes are to be improved.

Conclusions

On the whole, the EAL programme was implemented with high levels of fidelity with a mean score of 34.6 out of 40. Adherence to the programme's design was particularly strong in relation to the practitioner training (initial and cluster sessions), the developmental movement experiences and the SEYS support components of the programme. On the other hand, fidelity levels were adversely affected by poor ratios of EAL trained practitioners working with children in settings, poor implementation of the home visits and low levels of attendance at the parent workshop.

In accordance with the Carroll et al conceptual framework, the analysis of potential moderators of fidelity led to the identification of quality of delivery as the biggest predictor of fidelity. This moderator accounted for 57% of the variability in fidelity scores.

In terms of the process of implementing the programme, the feedback from the majority of practitioners, managers and parents was very positive and most programme components achieved high implementation scores.

Initial practitioner and cluster training: a combination of both very useful content and effective format/delivery style led to the successful implementation of this component of the EAL programme. The training enabled much new learning and practice development regarding more appropriate and effective interactions with two year olds.

The service design manual: the content and accessibility were particular strengths of the manual and led to practitioners valuing it as a constant source of reference and support throughout implementation.

The developmental movement experiences: implementation of this component was most successful in settings where:

- practitioners were not overly risk adverse and let children explore the challenges presented by the experiences
- practitioners were confident and adequately skilled to fully develop the experiences and maintain children's interest in them
- there was adequate space to accommodate the resources and therefore fully implement the experiences

SEYS support: this component emerged as one of the most important and valuable aspects of the programme in terms of enabling and motivating practitioners to deliver the programme. Specific success factors were the bespoke and solution-oriented support provided and the trusting relationships developed between practitioners and their SEYS.

Home learning package: The workshop, home learning manual and resource pack were all well received by parents and contributed to high levels of enjoyable and mutually beneficial play activities and interactions between parents and their children. The only component of the programme which was relatively less successful than others was the home visiting which was adversely affected by low levels of practitioner confidence in engaging with parents, a lack of support from setting management and timing/logistical issues associated with undertaking the visits.

Looking across the programme's implementation, there were two common and important factors which acted as barriers to achieving high fidelity and successful implementation. The first factor relates to management support and buy-in to the programme, which, when not present, led to a number of difficulties including:

- poor practitioner attendance at training sessions
- poor implementation of home visits (as referred to above) and
- a lack of autonomy afforded to practitioners to fully develop the movement experiences.

Where management support was in place, implementation of the programme was more successful - many of these managers had attended the initial training sessions and therefore fully understood the rationale and requirements of the programme.

The second factor which affected some settings was the lack of knowledge of the programme by regulation and inspection staff who were unaware of the EAL programme's aims and rationale and consequently questioned some of the practice taking place and the layout of rooms where the programme was being delivered.

Recommendations

Given the high levels of fidelity and successful implementation found in this study, only a few improvements to programme have been identified. These focus on:

1. Improving the support levels and buy-in to the programme from setting management

Thought needs to be given to the issues faced by management in facilitating practitioner attendance at training and conducting home visits. Strategies to encourage their support for the programme need to be developed. Early Years should consider the following:

- Developing and delivering an additional management training component of the programme which focuses on enabling understanding of the programme's aims and objectives and of the role required by management in supporting effective implementation in settings; or

- Encouraging management to attend an initial information session for managers and perhaps developing an additional module for the training which is specifically dedicated to the role of setting management in successfully delivering and implementing the programme

2. Increasing the support provided to practitioners on engaging with parents and understanding their role of parents in providing play opportunities for young children

All staff should be provided with more guidance on how to engage effectively with parents and deliver effective home visits. This should be incorporated throughout the relevant programme components, including:

- The initial and cluster training sessions where the use of role plays, as suggested by practitioners, would be a valuable way of exploring common difficulties faced by practitioners and strategies for overcoming these
- The service design manual – where a FAQ (frequently asked questions) or troubleshooting section on delivering the home visits could be added to current content
- The SEYS support – where some of the support visits could be dedicated to providing tailored guidance on any specific issues faced by practitioners in settings when engaging with parents.

With regard to implementing the movement experiences, the above components of the programme should also be used as vehicles for emphasising the importance of affording children independence, and allowing them to take appropriate risks, so that they benefit fully from all the challenges the experiences offer. Given the limited space in some settings, the advice and support provided by the SEYS in these settings should be focussed on ways of maximising the use of the space available so that quality or fidelity of implementation of this pivotal programme component is not compromised.

3. Improving regulation and inspection authorities' knowledge and understanding of the programme

All group based settings in Northern Ireland are regulated and inspected by the HSCT. In the roll out of the programme it is important for Early Years to engage with the regulators and inspectors of early years services to ensure that they are aware of the programme, have a full understanding of its rationale, have an understanding of the importance of developmental movement and of the relevance of this programme to improve programme quality and outcomes for young children.

4. Developing an internal monitoring system for evaluating fidelity and implementation

Finally, as part of a programme for continuous improvement of the EAL programme , Early Years should consider developing an internal monitoring system to evaluate future fidelity to the programme's design and implementation, consulting on a regular basis with each of the key stakeholders involved in programme development and delivery.

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