Final Report:

Process Evaluation of HELLO: A tool to improve communication, language and literacy practice in early years settings

May 2016

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Contents

Executive Summary

Helping Early Language Literacy Outcomes (HELLO) is a National Literacy Trust audit tool for Early Years practitioners to improve Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) outcomes for children aged 0-3 years. The HELLO audit tool focuses on three key areas; partnerships with parents, practitioner skills, and enabling environments. Each setting completes the tool to devise an action plan outlining how they are to improve their current provision to enhance CLL outcomes.

Between May 2015 and April 2016 the National Literacy Trust received funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to pilot HELLO in seven areas with local authorities and teaching schools acting as Expert Area Leads. 74 Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) Nursery settings took part in the project. The evaluation of HELLO used a mixed methods approach. This report focuses on the process evaluation and a second report focuses on the survey data. The evaluation collected a wealth of data, this report documents the implementation models of three areas using a process evaluation framework. The process evaluation reported that:

- Sharing practice and being able to visit other settings as part of the HELLO programme was of great benefit to practitioners involved.
- A strength of the HELLO audit tool is that it is a flexible audit tool compared to those currently available.
- Parent partnership was a unique area in HELLO compared to other auditing tools.
- Practitioners felt the tool required additional critical questions to delve deeper into improving their practice, or a 'critical friend'. Without critical questions the HELLO tool could be seen as a tick-box exercise.
- There are a number of ways to implement HELLO with success; the two key components are networking and having a supportive local lead.
- All setting staff need to be aware of the project and encouraged to participate in some way.

Key recommendations from the process evaluation are:
- Further roll out of the HELLO tool due to positive findings.
- To continue with the evaluation of the HELLO tool due to different implementation models.
- The HELLO tool requires scaffolding via the inclusion of critical questions to probe current practices to develop reflective practice.
- The HELLO toolkit resources need to be relevant, up to date and easy to access.
- Guidance on how to collate evidence of impact is needed for participating settings.
- Peer to peer support and setting visits are a key element of the HELLO programme and should be encouraged.

Background and Evaluation Methodology

Background

Helping Early Language and Literacy Outcomes (HELLO) is a self-assessment and action planning programme, which focuses on the use of a tool to support early years practitioners to improve communication, language and literacy outcomes for children of pre-school age, from birth to age three.

Between May 2015 and April 2016 the National Literacy Trust received funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver the HELLO programme in seven areas across England. Those areas were Derby, Bradford, Bedford, Scarborough, Reading, Liverpool and Middlesbrough. The HELLO tool was part of a programme facilitated in the seven areas by either a Nursery Teaching School (5 areas) or Local Authority Early Years Department (2 areas). The Teaching School or Local Authority were responsible for recruiting between 7-12 Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) early years settings. As part of their role as Early Years Leads, these partners provided support, guidance and best practice to their local settings. This was mainly delivered through organising local network meetings; these meetings were part of the HELLO programme as a means to share best practice, encourage peer-to-peer support and review the HELLO audit tool in a friendly environment. In total 74 PVIs settings delivered the HELLO project. Coventry University was commissioned by the National Literacy Trust to independently evaluate the implementation of HELLO.

The HELLO tool focuses on self-assessing and action planning in three key areas of early years practice:
1.   Skilled practitioners
2.   Partnership with Parents
3.   Enabling environments

The *partnership with parents* area of the tool focuses on sharing information with parents and exchanging advice to support parents with their child's Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) development. The *skilled practitioner* area was included to improve the quality of interactions of early years practitioners with children to enhance children's CLL outcomes. The *enabling environments* area aimed to improve the settings' capacity to enhance and promote CLL development. Included within this section was a focus on digital media and supporting settings in considering how digital media can promote CLL development in the early years.

The HELLO tool comprised three questions to prompt discussion and create a clear action plan of how settings would seek to improve; '*what we do now*', '*what we need to do next*' and '*who will do*

it and by when'. These questions were to prompt practitioners to think about what they do well and also examine what the gaps in their provision are whilst also evidencing points made. Through this self-reflection process, while completing the HELLO tool, practitioners devised their action plan. Alongside the HELLO self-assessment tool, a resource pack relevant to each area of the tool was devised to provide ideas of what settings could do next. This resource pack was made available online through the National Literacy Trust Network and via Dropbox for the HELLO area leads.

Evaluation Methodology

A mixed methods evaluation was used to provide a comprehensive report for the National Literacy Trust on the impact and effectiveness of the tool. The evaluation was designed around the three key objectives for the project (see Table 1). This report focuses on the process evaluation, which address key objective two.

Table 1: Key Outcomes of the HELLO Project Evaluation

Outcome No.	Outcome
KO1	Improvement in practitioner understanding of early years communication, language and literacy skills.
KO2	Evidence on the implementation of the improvement tool across settings.
KO3	Improvement in practitioner's confidence in developing children's literacy skills, engaging parents and use of digital media in settings.

To collect detailed information regarding the implementation of the HELLO programme, a process evaluation framework was used in three selected areas. These areas were selected to represent the North, Midlands and South of England. To ensure anonymity the three areas that participated in the process evaluation will be labelled throughout the rest of this report as Area A, Area B and Area C. Process evaluation is an important evaluation approach when investigating the implementation of a project across a number of sites. It provides data on a case-by-case basis, which in turn offers a comprehensive understanding of implementation across all sites. The process evaluation framework for this project gathered data on the implementation of the tool (fidelity), whether all the areas of the tool were completed (dose received), were the participants happy with the project (dose satisfaction), did the tool reach the target audience (reach), recruitment process of PVI settings in each area and context to explore the barriers and facilitators to implementation. Table 2 documents how each of these elements map on to the evaluation.

Table 2: Process Evaluation Framework for Project HELLO

Process Evaluation	Process Evaluation Question	Data Sources
Fidelity	Extent to which the Improvement Tool was implemented and used as intended?	Observations Focus group discussions and interviews with staff. Network Meeting Minutes Learning Journals
Dose Delivered	Were all areas of the tool implemented?	Observations Network Meeting Minutes
Dose Received	Were all parties satisfied with the tool?	Interviews and Focus group discussions with staff.
Reach	Was the tool used with the target audience?	Pre & Post Measure of Practitioner Confidence Interviews and Focus group discussions
Recruitment	How were the nurseries recruited? Were there any barriers to recruitment (i.e. engagement)?	Interviews and Focus group discussions Network Meetings Minutes Learning Journals
Context	What were the barriers and facilitators to implementing the tool?	Focus group discussions and Interviews Observations Learning Journals Network Meeting Minutes

In each area the evaluators attended all Network meetings held with the local settings, totalling three in each area. Additionally, the evaluators attended Network meetings organised by the National Literacy Trust that all the area leads attended. All settings in the three focus areas were asked to complete a learning log, documenting the implementation and impact of the HELLO programme in their setting, this log allowed the staff to reflect on their practice, benefiting both the evaluation and the settings. The number of learning logs received by area is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Breakdown of Learning Logs received compared to number of participating settings

Area	Number of participating settings	Number of learning logs received
Area A	10	7
Area B	9	5
Area C	9	6

For the expert leads, interviews were conducted in Area A and Area B, whereas in Area C, due to the delivery model, two focus group discussions were used to gather data from both teams involved in the delivery. The interviews and focus group discussions lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the practitioner responsible for the completion of the HELLO tool in their setting, in most cases this was the setting manager. These interviews aimed to explore the implementation of the tool and their experiences of the project; these lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. Focus group discussions were organised with practitioners in the settings who had not directly led the project to find out their thoughts on the HELLO tool, changes that had been made in the setting and the impact on their skills. The size of the focus groups varied as it depended on attendance, but these did not exceed eight people and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Data was gathered from 35 interviews and focus group discussions with 57 participants. The number of interviews and focus group discussions conducted in each area is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Breakdown of Interviews and Focus Groups conducted in each area.

Area	Area Lead Interview	Practitioner Interview	Practitioner Focus Group	Total
Area A	1	10	2	13
Area B	1	9	1	11
Area C	2	7	2	11
				35

In the three focus areas, three settings volunteered to participate in the observation element of the evaluation; this was included to explore the implementation of the tool, and 18 observations were completed. In the first visit the evaluators observed the setting completing the self-assessment tool and during the second implementation of the action plan was observed. Use of digital media was observed at each of these visits. The visits ranged from 30 to 180 minutes in the settings.

Process Evaluation: Implementation Model

Table 5: Implementation of the HELLO programme in Area A, B and C

Area	Area Lead	Implementation Model	Financial support	Staff Involvement	Areas of focus	Additional comments
Area A	Nursery Teaching Alliance	Peer Support Model Three Network Meetings Settings completed the tool individually Area lead visited all but one setting during the project to discuss progress. Settings were partnered for visits.	Financial support to visit other settings and to attend network meetings, in the form of back filling staff time.	The lead practitioner at each setting completed the tool, with minimal staff feedback to devise the action plan. .	Parent engagement	Language development was an area of particular concern. Prior relationships with most PVI settings
Area B	Teaching School	Peer Support Model Two Network Meetings Area Lead visited the settings twice, once to discuss the tool and the other to discuss the action plan. Arranged visits with partnered settings.	£500 to support Network meeting attendance and visiting other settings. £500 for resources.	The lead practitioner in most settings completed the tool with minimal feedback.	Digital media and enabling environments.	No prior relationship with PVI settings recruited. One setting left the project just before the end.

Area	Area Lead	Implementation Model	Financial support	Staff Involvement	Areas of focus	Additional comments
Area C	The contract was awarded to a Teaching School in the area, the Local Authority Early Years team delivered the contract	Coaching Model Expertise in the team reflected the needs of the settings, with two speech and language therapists, two early years teachers, one local authority link worker and one PVI manager. Implementation model was bespoke to what was needed and what settings wanted. An evaluation framework was implemented in this area. Settings were advised to visit other settings to look at specific areas of good practice that had been identified by a coach e.g. environmental print or parent partnerships	£100 to spend on resources for the project	Typically the setting manager completed the HELLO tool with the coach.	Tailored to individual setting needs.	Established relationship with PVI settings. Evaluation framework was developed by the lead partner team, which included the completion of the Infant/Toddlers Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), practitioner surveys based on the three areas of the tool and a parent questionnaire. All settings were given the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) from the Communication Trust. HELLO toolkit was a springboard to develop practitioners thinking and questioning skills.

The main focus of the process evaluation was to explore the implementation of the HELLO programme across three areas in thirty settings. To ensure anonymity the three areas that participated in the process evaluation will be labelled throughout the report as Area A, Area B and Area C. The model of implementation was similar in areas A and B, whereas Area C took a different approach. The main requirements for the programme was that the Expert Lead in each area from either the Teaching School or Local Authority organised three network meetings and provided a level of support to their settings during the project to complete the HELLO audit tool. The model of implementation was intended to be flexible to suit local needs and this can be seen by the three implementation models described in Table 5 above.

Established Networks

The implementation of HELLO varied by area and by setting. All areas recruited a mix of PVI settings as instructed, what differed was the way in which settings were recruited. Area A and Area C worked with established networks, whereas Area B recruited PVI settings they had not previously worked with. The contract for Area C was initially awarded to a Teaching School in the area; however, the contract was executed by the Local Authority Early Years team, due to the early years team already having established working relationships with local PVI settings. This was felt to be a positive move by the Teaching School as evidenced here:

'*It would be easier to work with the city to run the project rather than us ourselves trying to build those relationships up.*' (Area C).

Furthermore the settings thought it was also a positive to work with someone who knew the nursery set up. The previous rapport helped with the implementation as that trust and knowledge about the settings was already there.

'*I think it helped in a way that the coach understood the sort of families that we are working with and the barriers so I think it helped we didn't have to do a lot of explaining.*' (Area C)

'*I've always found [Coach] really helpful to be honest with you. Again because she knows the setting it makes it a bit easier than someone new coming and she understands what we are doing already. [Coach] has been really supportive.*' (Area C)

The model of implementation differed across the three focus areas. Areas A and B used a peer support model whereas Area C used a coaching model. The coaching model was decided upon

due to prior knowledge of the settings and their needs, the area leads felt the settings would need a lot of support to complete the project. Thus the support from the area lead differed. Area A and B could be considered a light touch approach to delivering the programme compared to Area C. In Area A the lead visited the majority of the settings once, in Area B the settings were visited twice whereas in Area C five meetings were scheduled. In Area A not all the settings received the same amount of support from the lead partner, those with a previous relationship or who were part of the teaching school alliance received additional contact; although not necessarily as an explicit part of HELLO.

'Not for HELLO, but she's been out to the school for other things so I have seen her around but not for the HELLO in particular.' (Area A)

The level of support may also have differed due to the settings selected, Areas A and B worked with settings with an Ofsted rating of 'good' or 'outstanding' whereas Area C worked with settings with an Ofsted rating ranging from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'. Area C leads '*deliberately picked deprived, vulnerable and funded two-year-old settings'*, thus these settings may have needed extra support. Prior relationships informed the implementation model in Area A and C. Thus prior knowledge of settings is a positive but not necessary as shown in Area B.

Monetary support
The level of financial support also differed across the three models. For Area A and B financial support was provided to visit other settings and attend network meetings. In Area B the financial support also enabled practitioners to access training and new resources which was useful as evidenced by the quote below. The HELLO project enabled settings to overcome barriers such as financial when accessing training and networking with other settings. Without the project it may be difficult for settings to continue networking and accessing training.

'*The money was good and we are all for new resources, it was worth it.*' (Area B)

Expert Support
The coaching model enabled the support to be tailored to the individual settings and provided a lot of one-to-one support compared to Area A and B. In Area C the coaches met with their individual settings at least five times during the project. Whereas in Area A individual settings were visited at least once and in Area B individual settings were visited twice. All Area Leads were available via e-mail and telephone, what differed were the face-to-face meetings. Furthermore in Area A three network meetings were organised, in Area B two network meetings were organised; however in

Area C three network meetings were organised alongside two training sessions; one on digital media and one on English as an Additional Language. Due to the increased contact, the HELLO programme was tailored in Area C offering additional in-house training.

Area C also offered additional support by delving deeper into the audit tool with critical questions and focusing on the key areas of improvement. Area C implemented an evaluation model which was put in place to tailor what support practitioners wanted and examine what support parents needed. At the interviews and focus group discussions, settings spoke about how it would have not been possible to complete the project had it not been for the support of their coach.

'*Because of the coach model, it ensured that all settings used the HELLO framework effectively, even if they have different end and start points.*' (Area C).

'*I don't think I would have been able to complete it without her because there was so much to do in the project and doing it alongside work as well, I did find it a bit of a struggle at some points so having [Coach] to support me was good, she helped me a lot.*' (Area C)

'*It was the most beneficial part of the project if I am honest, that professional to go back and forth with.*' (Area C)

The different models of implementation by area show that HELLO is a flexible programme, allowing settings to change and adapt the programme and the tool to their setting. The observations and learning logs provide evidence of implementation and paved the way to understanding the models of implementation. The rest of the report will focus on the data gathered as part of the process evaluation with support from the survey responses (the survey data can be found in a separate report) to discuss the implementation of the HELLO programme.

The HELLO Tool

Staff Involvement

All settings were e-mailed an online survey at the end of the project, sixty practitioners responded. A total of forty-seven survey respondents had an active role in completing the HELLO audit tool (17 practitioners, 29 managers, 1 refused to say). The following section looks at their experiences and reflections of this together with data from the interviews and focus group discussions. Over a third of the respondents completed the tool without any assistance (42.6%). If the tool was completed by more than one person, in the case of the practitioner they received support mainly from a senior manager or a non-lead member of staff. Whereas if the manager was completing the tool they received input from the room lead or non-lead staff member. This shows that staff were working together to complete the tool in most cases, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Reports who completed the audit tool split by job role (note: more than one may have been selected)

	Practitioner	Manager	Total
Completed by self	35%	65%	42.6%
Completed with a senior manager	60%	40%	21.3%
With a room head/lead	12.5%	87.5%	17%
With internal non-lead staff members	45.5%	54.5%	23.4%
With someone from another nursery	0%	6.8%	4.3%
With a coach/area lead	0%	17.2%	10.6%

The majority of respondents (68.1%) reported a fellow colleague had reviewed their HELLO toolkit once completed. The most common person to review the tool was either a member of senior management or coaches/area leads (see Table 6); this is likely to be due to them being seen as 'experts'.

Table 6: Percentage of people who checked the tool after completion

Senior manager	40.6%
Room head/lead	12.5%
Internal non-lead staff members	6.3%
Coach/area lead	40.6%

Involvement of staff in the project differed in the three areas and the settings; as it depended on the number of staff and the availability of staff. As this setting highlights with a small team all four practitioners were involved, this may however not be possible for a larger nursery.

'*There is only four of us, we have done it together, it has been in a team and we have decided on the resources together.*' (Area B)

Some setting leads for HELLO completed the tool and provided staff with little information about the project. Whereas other settings involved staff, asked for their opinions and ideas. The focus group discussions with practitioners highlighted the difference in staff involvement and the implications of this. In one focus group two practitioners discussed how they '*weren't given much information*' and '*didn't really know it was going on'*. In those settings where practitioners were involved they felt it helped more with their practice, confidence, knowledge and understanding.

'*We were just given bits, so everyone was given a bit and [Manager] went through it with us and everyone had a bit to take a key role with.*' (Area A)
'*I wanted to roll it out with all the staff because I think it is important for them to have the same messages and be developing as well.*' (Area C)
'*We all sat down with them and had their feedback from the kind of notes I had made and the areas we were looking at.*' (Area A)
'*It generated quite a lot of discussion within staff meetings and within the team itself*.' (Area B)
'*Part of the agenda was HELLO project, so that we could discuss what we did do or what we are going to implement or how are we going to get parents involved because our parental involvement isn't great.*' (Area C)

Involvement of staff can be difficult due to availability, for those that were supernumerary it helped with completing the project. In the case of the two quotes below, the setting leads that were also

the managers were supernumerary so it was easy for them to be involved. This was not the case for all managers, thus staff availability is a barrier to all staff being involved in the project.

'I filled in most of the paperwork because obviously that's my job and I am supernumerary so I have had the opportunity to do that.' (Area A)

'I am supernumerary so I'm not in numbers really so it's easier for me to get out and about.' (Area C)

It is difficult to decipher whether having all staff involved improved outcomes. However, to improve practitioner skills and understanding it would be important that staff were made aware of the project. In Area A, on reflection, the Area Lead felt it was important that all staff were involved, thus proposed a change to the HELLO programme that all staff were involved in some way in the project or were at least given information about the project. Furthermore the Area Leads in Areas B and C noted, after completing the project, that for it to work in the future all staff need to be involved. Therefore a recommendation for future roll outs of HELLO is to make all staff within a setting aware of the project.

'We needed to be working together really in order for it to work.' (Area A)

'I would like to bring more of my staff involved to see what they want to do in certain types of areas.' (Area A)

'No I filled in the tool, to be honest looking back I would have liked to involve staff a bit more… time constraints have had an impact upon how much I could involve them, but looking back I would have wanted to involve them more.' (Area C)

'Time consuming in the sense but if you want to do it well you have to get the whole team on board.' (Area B)

Completing the HELLO tool

The implementation of the HELLO tool varied, thus the range of time spent completing the tool is vast. Some practitioners reported spending a few hours on the tool, some a whole day or a few days. Those who used the tool as a reflective document dipped in and out, thus practitioners could not accurately say how long they had spent completing the tool as evidenced by these two survey responses.

"Not sure as did this at different times, dipping in and out"

"It has been on-going throughout"

The majority of practitioners reported that the tool was neither easy nor hard to fill out, this suggests that the tool was accessible. The responses in the survey suggest that at times the HELLO tool could be repetitive, overlap with other audit forms and be quite subjective in some of its focus:

"The sections weren't difficult or easy to complete however it was slightly repetitive so there is quite similar information in many of the boxes."

"We have used audit tools before and felt that this was nothing different"

"As the Manager, I am able to look at all rooms and assess their needs. So I was able to look at the environment and see what needed to be changed and make changes in order to achieve this project to meet the needs of the children."

The three areas of the tool (practitioner skills, enabling environments and parent partnerships) were considered to cover the correct areas to improve CLL.

'I wouldn't change the three areas because they are key.' (Area C)

Table 7: The percentage of practitioners agreeing that HELLO is helpful for the three key areas

HELLO was helpful to support working with parents	78.7%
HELLO was helpful for improving practitioner skills	76.6%
HELLO was helpful for improving the environment	74.5%

As can be seen from Table 7 all areas of the tool were helpful for practitioners, however the most beneficial area of the HELLO tool was working with parents. This is likely to be because practitioners felt there are currently no audit tools available that highlight this as an area of concern, thus a unique element of the HELLO tool.

The flexibility embedded within the HELLO programme for some settings was good as it reduced anxiety as not all areas of the tool had to be completed, but rather the tool can adapt to the settings' needs. Furthermore the flexibility enables the tool to be tailored to each setting.

'*Initially I was kind of like I'm not sure how this is going to work but looking back it has been quite a useful tool, particularly for looking at the areas with parents and getting them involved.*' (Area A)

'*It has been quite useful I mean at times, you think urgh it is going to take ages to fill this out, but then you look back on it, it does make you think.*' (Area B)

'*Am I just ticking boxes, but actually what does the parent and more importantly what does the child get out of it.*' (Area C)

'*Localised to your setting, it will only work here because it works here. That's what it is set up for, it's very flexible.*' (Area A)

Critical Framework

The flexibility however, as one Area Lead pointed out might not be suitable for all, especially settings that are struggling. Thus critical questions are needed to support those settings or additional resources such as Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) are required. For instance in Area C ITERS was used to evidence areas where changes were needed, suggesting that the HELLO tool could be used alongside other audit tools in the field.

'*Would still have been useful without or with [ITERS/ECERS], but they support each other.*' (Area A)

'*I felt that sometimes people don't want that detail because it lacks flexibility so that people can individualise it, can add what suited them. The structure could possibly come from the people using the tool, that certainly worked for Area C. Rather [than] a tick-box, it actually makes them think more about it, it could be a disadvantage for settings that struggle with that.*' (Area C)

The coaching model in Area C highlighted that critical questions from the coach were needed to unpick what the practitioners were writing, to evidence what they currently do and think about what they could do, these reflective skills were being taught during the project.

'HELLO needs critical questions and examples of good practice for each section.' (Area C)
'Additional critical questions.' (Area B)

The box '*what we do now*' was considered to be non-specific, and it was a concern in Area C that the tool would become a tick-box exercise. This was felt to be an issue with the tool, and more so in the enabling environments section. As this was a short project, with the majority of settings starting HELLO in October and finishing in March, the enabling environments section offered quick fixes. In Areas A and B many of the changes noted focused on the environment, with some changes made to parent partnerships and practitioner skills. Furthermore settings in these areas mentioned the tool gave them the reason to complete projects previously planned.

'A lot of the stuff needed doing anyway but it was good because it sort of gave us a plan of what we need to do.' (Area A)

'The library service was always something that we talked about, but again it was the staff and the time, it never really got done. This was something that I really wanted to have an excuse for; we could actually get it done with no excuses.' (Area A)

'I look at the ones that were the easiest and quickest to get done, so that we could get things improving quicker.' (Area A)

'A lot more effort needed as more barriers when engaging parents/upskilling practitioners, whereas environment is an easy win, other aspects are a long term thing'. (Area A)

Practitioners reported using many methods to ensure that the targets they set were achievable, this included ensuring that they were realistic, by starting immediately, by having "lengthy and achievable time frames", checking ideas with coaches and setting managers, ensuring that targets were individualised to the setting, making targets specific and discussing them with the whole team. Some practitioners however, did report that it was "hard" to achieve everything they wanted in the timeframe. With a longer timeframe there could be less of a focus on quick fixes. However without the structure of a research project the National Literacy Trust needs to ensure in practice the focus is not on quick fixes. This could be achieved by developing the critical framework to support the three sections of the HELLO tool.

To delve deeper to enable reflective practice all three areas highlighted that further probing questions were needed. To sustain the use of the tool it needs to embed a new way of working

rather than being a tick-box exercise making quick changes. In light of these comments the HELLO tool needs to provide a critical framework comprising of questions to develop reflective practice, or guidance outlining how to be a critical friend or coach to enhance reflective practice. The Area Leads in both Area A and B on reflection suggested a change to their implementation model would have been to introduce a 'critical friend' to complete the tool with.

'*If I did it again I would support more for content of visits, more like a critical friend.*' (Area A)

'*Additional critical questions [are needed] but how can we guide practitioners using a simple way to evaluate their practice. Yes this is a good way to start that but is it the best that would be my question.*' (Area B)

Documenting impact

The tool was designed to make practitioners more reflective of their practice; one way this was encouraged was through documenting evidence. Practitioners reported documenting their progress in many ways including:

- observations
- self-evaluation forms
- photographs
- planning
- monitoring library usage
- discussions
- daily evaluations
- through asking practitioners their opinions
- learning journeys
- feedback forms

This shows the plethora of devices practitioners are using; however, it does show that there is room for improvement within settings who report that the only evidence they use is through general observations and talking to practitioners. Area C felt the tool did not provide enough guidance on how settings could measure the impact of changes made. Much of the impact evidence discussed related to observations in Area A and B. Whereas Area C used ITERS as a pre and post measurement tool alongside a parent and practitioner questionnaire. Area C spent time developing an evaluation framework for settings. We suggest that the National Literacy Trust

provide additional support on how to measure impact, for example a 'hints and tips' guide on how to collate evidence, as part of the HELLO programme.

'*The people you will find who have had the most success with the project are those that put things alongside it*' (Area B).

'*Yes we did, we scored 7s [on the ITERS] on majority first time but we got quite a few low numbers then on the second audit everything was really high so we showed loads of improvements we were dead impressed*' (Area C)

Sustainability

86.7% of practitioners surveyed reported that they intend to continue to use the HELLO tool in some form, which further highlights its usefulness. Ways in which it will be used vary between individuals and the survey responses include:

"*We have SEF (Self Evaluation Framework) action plan that is more relevant to setting targets and HELLO can be transferred onto this.*"

"*We found it all very helpful will use all the parts as it gives you an overview of your whole practice throughout the setting*"

"*I will revisit once every six months.*"

"*The project will be ongoing.*"

In the interviews and focus group discussions, some settings said they would not use the HELLO tool after the project but would remember the principles. Whereas other settings were keen to use the tool again to ensure there is excellent CLL provision in their setting. These settings have integrated the HELLO tool with their current practices, so it is no longer seen as a separate audit tool.

'*I think some of it we will keep looking at and help us reflect on what we are doing.*' (Area A)
'*You might use it to help you complete your [local audit tool], rather than as a standalone thing.*' (Area A)

'*We have put it as part of our action plan for here [the nursery].*' (Area A)

Due to the different implementation model in Area C and all the extra resources settings received, the HELLO tool was only a small part of the programme delivered. When talking with these settings, the focus was to keep the evaluation tools so they could continue to evaluate themselves and to reflect on their practice.

'*I think I will definitely pick bits out of it yes, so like the staff questionnaires, the parent questionnaires I would like to continue those and sort of the audits and the interaction checklist.*' (Area C)

'*I think because you are more reflecting on your own practice and reflecting on your own practice it is a lot more sustainable.*' (Area C)

Overall the majority of participants suggested they would continue to use the HELLO programme, if only elements of it such as the Network meetings.

Resource Toolkit

Alongside the HELLO assessment tool, the National Literacy Trust compiled a resource toolkit that practitioners could use to make changes via Dropbox. Most areas disseminated this to all practitioners; despite this only 25% reported using this resource. 43.2% of practitioners reported using no aspects of the Dropbox resource and 31.8% reported using only some parts. This may be due to difficulties accessing the internet and having limited time, overall very few practitioners used the National Literacy Trust resources.

"*NLT resources were more than enough, but you needed time to look through Dropbox; as practitioners we don't have enough time.*' (Area A)
'*Staff didn't find them particularly easy to use…it's time for staff in particular to browse stuff like that.*' (Area B)
'*I don't have access to a computer in the setting.*' (Area A)

Positive comments were received from the practitioners that did use the resources after overcoming difficulties accessing the materials. This highlights that access to the resources needs to be made easy.

'*We printed the early reading toolkit and I printed the whole 50 page document. But if I had not of worked out how to get on it I would have not used it.*' (Area B)

'We used an audit from the NLT that helped us with the book corner. It was the book corner audit and the whole setting audit.' (Area B)

Furthermore the materials need to be selected carefully so they are relevant; covering all ages from birth to three, and also ensure that they are accessible.

'NLT resources, some on the current are dated, Amercanised or expensive.' (Area C)

From the qualitative data a variety of other resources were often used in its place, including ITERS, ECERS, EYFS, ECAT, STEWW, network meetings, Teacher Talk, 'small talk', 'Building Blocks', ICAN, SEND, dialogic talk, five to thrive, lift off to language and specialist training from local authorities and speech and language specialists. The most commonly reported tools were the ITERS, ECERS and ECAT; this may be due to the popularity of these tools. Future resources have been suggested by practitioners in survey responses:

"*An engaging parent's toolkit*"

"*Support with using tablets & media*"

The majority of the practitioners used previous experience, staff knowledge, the internet and training to suggest ways to improve their practice. Ideas were also gathered from their area lead, network meetings and partnered setting(s).

'Pinterest is amazing, because you can even Pinterest ITERS and ECERS and it comes up with everything, Pinterest is a massive one and on Facebook there are different groups.' (Area A)
'Use more websites to broaden my knowledge.' (Area A)
'Resources have come from other settings initially what they have been using.' (Area B)
'Coach gave me a lot of ideas like when we were discussing things that was a good idea, I will write that down.' (Area C)
'From the training, 100% from the training. The language wheels and the resources.' (Area C)
'I think going to other settings is where I have taken up my inspiration for, or talking to other people from other settings.' (Area A)

Distinctiveness of HELLO
Area A and Area C were familiar with a number of evaluation/audit tools including the ITERS and the ECERs frameworks. In Area A there was a local audit tool which had a similar layout to

HELLO, asking settings to plan generally what they are going to do, when it will be done by, and who is going to do it. In Area B they had no prior knowledge of available audit tools.

'*Yes, the first one we have actually sat down and had time to look at and evaluate.*' (Area B)

This is of interest considering the popularity of ITERS in Area A and C, but not all found these other tools useful.

'*I think because it's [ITERS] American it doesn't fit everything, why on earth do you need 16 soft toys in a room. If it is not right for our children we are not doing it, but if it's what we have to do for this on the day you come they will be there but then we will take them away.*' (Area C)

HELLO for some practitioners was considered to be nothing new however; it differed to other audit tools due to inbuilt flexibility compared to other audit tools such as the ITERS which was described as a prescribed audit tool that does not provide ways to make changes. The HELLO tool addresses this limitation in the area of CLL by providing resources for settings to make changes.

'*I think this is broader, ITERS looks very much at practice, and ECERS will identify what you are doing whereas this [HELLO] is helping to maybe make some changes.*' (Area A)
'*I think it's something your HELLO that has been there before but in a different format, it wasn't anything new and it highlighted some things for us but I don't think it gave me the wow factor.*'
(Area B)

HELLO enables practitioners to reflect on their practice and say what they are going to do next, giving settings ideas on how they can improve. HELLO can therefore work alongside other audit tools.

They are very similar [HELLO, ITERS, ECERS] but I think you can link them.' (Area A)
'*I don't think the HELLO tool without them would be as efficient or as effective, as it would have been without them.*' (Area C)
'*I think it fits quite well with our [local audit tool] that we do for the borough and it helped feed into that, it is kind of a similar layout.*' (Area A)

However, as mentioned Area C leads felt the tool was too open and without the coach support settings would not have generated measureable targets and collected supporting evidence to prove what they do and how they do it, nor the impact of the changes implemented; as discussed

this is an area the tool can improve on. Therefore recommending additional probing questions are added to the HELLO tool.

'ITERS/ECERS can be too prescriptive, not relevant to all settings. It is often considered 'the gospel' but research has moved on since then and it is very Americanised rating system. HELLO on the other hand is too open and broad.' (Area C).

Networking

Partner Network Meetings
All Partner leads from the seven Teaching Schools and Local Authorities were invited to attend three meetings across the project with the National Literacy Trust. When interviewing the leads in the three areas, they all mentioned these to be fruitful meetings for the project, to learn from each other and share any worries or concerns.

'Excellent, got a lot out of it, nice to see and measure self against other excellent settings'. (Area A)
'Each one we have brought something back, you know the walk around is always nice, but just talking to people and sharing experiences and concerns at that level is really useful.' (Area C)

This suggests that partner meetings should be included in any national roll out of the project, with the National Literacy Trust hosting these meetings.

Local Network Meetings
Networking was a central feature of the implementation models. Overall, the networking aspect of the project was reported in the post survey to be the most useful part of the project, with 93.5% of practitioners intending to continue networking with other settings after the project. No practitioners reported that networking was not important for the project, most; 86.7% found it useful, and the other 13.3% found it 'somewhat' useful. Reasons for this given in the survey included:

"*Built confidence, inspired our practice, gave us fresh outlook and offered us more information and knowledge*"

"*As it was lovely to meet and see how people had got on with changing things, this includes the ideas they had as it was great and sometimes seems so simple to change.*"

In each area Network meetings were arranged and reciprocal visits to other settings to share good practice. The observations, learning logs, interviews and focus group discussions suggested that being able to build networks and share practice was a key part of the project and improved CLL outcomes. An example includes the use of dough disco in Area C to help with motor skills, after this was discussed at a Network meeting subsequently a number of other settings were implementing this activity.

'*Dough disco, we had never heard of that before, and they do enjoy that and its getting the boys involved because they tend to be the ones that don't want to take part in the creative and literacy side of things, so it's good to get them engaged*.' (Area C)

'*We have got staff that are doing dough disco for fine motor skills.*' (Area C)

In Area A, story spoons were used to bring stories to life in one setting, after a discussion at a Network meeting settings adapted this for their own needs e.g. making story key fobs as an alternative.

'*Like the spoons with the stories on. We have seen the ideas and we know what we want to do and we are going to go further with those.*' (Area A)

The Network meetings enabled practitioners to share their ideas and learn from each other. These meetings would not have been possible had it not been for the project. The Network meetings and the chance to build peer-to-peer support with other settings was considered one of the most useful parts of the HELLO programme. Furthermore, it highlighted to practitioners that developing supportive networks with other settings is an important activity to do. Thus Network meetings and setting visits should be encouraged in future roll outs of HELLO.

'*The network meetings have been great for getting other ideas.*' (Area A)

'*I think that is the most useful thing, the time to chat with other practitioners I think everyone said that at the meetings.*' (Area B)

'*Networking as well so we would pinch ideas from other settings, that was really nice and that's something we couldn't have done if we weren't on the programme.*' (Area C)

'*The networking itself really because you don't often get the chance.*' (Area A)

'Some things I found harder but then someone else said it so differently and I thought why didn't I think of it like that.' (Area A)

'We will fight to keep it going, it is a strong networking group that is something we want to keep going.' (Area A)

'Can give you fresh ideas, then you can look at how you adapt if for your setting'. (Area A)

'I think maybe more of those meetings would have been handy as I think they really would have helped a lot more [idea and implement more things].' (Area A)

Area leads signposted practitioners to other settings that were recognised for good practice in a certain area. In Area C, at an observation, a setting were putting book bags together with simple guides for parents on how to use the bag, but due to high EAL, the coach suggested linking with another setting that can help ensure the instructions are presented in a multilingual way. This shows how the HELLO programme can support directed purposeful networking to share good practice.

'It is nice to talk about and say oh we are struggling with this, for example the two simple software we use, X was really good at the other setting so she showed us how to update it all, so we got different things sharing ideas.' (Area B)

In all areas there were a mix of PVI settings, and in some cases these teams may not have ever interacted with other settings before. In being able to develop rapport and trust over the project, settings learnt about how it is to be a pack away or a charity nursery for example. These settings may do similar things but execute them in a different way due to constraints i.e. time and space. Thus settings were able to learn from one another, dissolving any misconceptions.

'I think it is good having the meetings with the other people we all had similar ideas but we all had different ways of doing them.' (Area A)

'It was really good to get to know other settings and listen to the things they do and get to know their ideas. Even just building those relationships between settings I found really good.' (Area C)

'I liked the fact that we could network with other nurseries I had not worked with a lot of those nurseries before.' (Area C)

'Very similar to ours and they are a pack away setting, the same constraints as us and it was nice to work with them and see how they do particular things, and they visited ours. We'd never spoken to each other before it was really nice, and now we are on each other Facebook page so we can see what's going on.' (Area C)

There is currently little opportunity to visit other settings and develop a peer-to-peer support network. Thus HELLO was unique in enabling this to happen; this was considered the most useful part of the project. In one learning log for Area A the practitioner described that their visit to another setting enabled them to visually see good practice and share information with the practitioners as well as share ideas. The sharing of ideas was a key part of the setting visits. Visiting other nurseries was suggested to be a useful exercise for practitioners who are new or who have worked at the same nursery since qualifying to see how different a setting can be run.

'Best part, going out and seeing another setting and being forced to do it, because you always say you are going to do it.' (Area A)

'What was really lovely was going to see your partner settings...that is a treat because we don't often get the chance to do that.' (Area A)

'I wish I could do more, I wish everybody could go not just me...seeing other settings is fantastic because you gain so much, not only to get new ideas but to reinforce what a good job you are doing.' (Area A)

'We bought a couple of things from her setting and she took a couple from ours so yeah that was nice, spent about an hour and half there and her here.' (Area B)

'It is useful for staff who never get in other settings or who have never worked in another setting before.' (Area B)

'I visited one of the preschools fresh ideas so although we had already had story sacks and things like that we decided to introduce book bags to the under 2s as well for the babies, we built on our story sacks and nursery rhyme sacks and also looking more into our observations.' (Area B)

'I think it really helps, went to see [setting] and I went to them on different occasions and we had a really good look round and I just think it gives you fresh ideas and enables you to talk with other practitioners about things.' (Area B)

'[Setting Lead] also showed me the iPad for storing all the children's observations, I had never seen that, I had heard of it but I hadn't seen it done.' (Area A)

Settings in Area A and B at the end of the project wished they had seen more settings than just the one. A potential improvement for the HELLO programme is therefore to encourage visits to other settings.

'I liked how you were paired with a setting but I wished that you could have maybe had a bigger group so that instead of just a pair maybe 3 or 4 so you can see more than just one setting.' (Area A)

'I think we could have made more links with other settings, more interactions with the other settings I think.' (Area B)

Although learning about other settings was beneficial, it could also be problematic. If settings are very different this may hinder staff confidence. However on the other side it helps to breakdown preconceptions about a setting and builds new relationships.

'At the end of the day it is a private business whereas we are a charity so we don't have a huge amount to spend, but one of the things it made me realise, even though we have never been to one of those settings, is how difficult it must be if you are a pack away setting.' (Area C)

Networking was crucial to the HELLO project, and needs to be encouraged in future roll outs. For this to be successful, barriers need to be addressed such as time and money; something which project funding can alleviate. Competition between settings around two-year-old funded places can also hinder full participation, if settings are in the same geographical location; this is something the area lead would have to manage. By building up trust this barrier to networking may be overcome.

'I think it's the timing and money to make the changes.' (Area A)

Location is an issue also, as it is important to consider that some of the settings which were further apart geographically found it harder to visit their partner sites. In these cases a greater time commitment was involved and issues around transportation arose.

Staffing for smaller settings was a big issue; it hindered full participation as staff were needed in the nursery. Those members of staff who were supernumerary were able to leave whereas those staff members, who were in numbers, found attending the networking meeting and visiting settings difficult.

'Biggest barrier was attending the network meetings.' (Area C)

'Time to get the staff in to cover.' (Area C)

Despite these barriers the networking part of the project was the most beneficial element of the project, with settings wanted more network meetings and more time to visit other settings. In response to how useful one setting in Area B had found the visits it is now included in their action plan to visit more settings in the geographical area.

'The network meetings, they were the thing that brought it all together.' (Area A)

'It is really important to send them [staff] to and we will continue to, we are going to send two to [other setting] actually you see how they are using digital technology but in terms of the email system that they use because we are still using the old format of learning journeys…because other settings have got greater expertise in certain areas and that's how we will improve.' (Area B)

'We have put in our plan to try and send all of the staff to a few nurseries around we have got links with different nurseries around just for an hour to look around just to help for ideas and I think it just motivates them as well.' (Area B)

'This project wouldn't have been so good if we didn't have that shared practice.' (Area A)

All three areas have scheduled in a Network meeting for later on in the year sustaining the project. These meetings allowed practitioners to share ideas and support each other in way that other meetings in the area did not.

"I have sent an email out to all the girls to see if they can come along and hopefully they will all come and we can continue that network because that was a benefit as well and [Area] is quite a small city so we are quite a small group to network with each other and a lot of our children and families are overlapping so it's good to have that shared practice. I know I will be working with [the council] to make sure it keeps going" (Area C)

'We *don't want to just stop and not communicate anymore, it's quite nice to meet up at meetings and have discussions about things as well that are troubling us.*' (Area B)

Conclusion

The three areas of the tool were considered the right areas to focus on as they are crucial to improve language, literacy and communication outcomes. The implementation of the tool differed across areas and settings. Differences included staff involvement, documentation of changes, information used to make changes and focus areas. The process evaluation reported HELLO was unique in its ability to be flexible; settings could tailor the HELLO programme to suit their needs.

From the data gathered it cannot be suggested that either implementation model is more successful than the other. The data paints a picture of how the model was implemented and highlights areas of good practice. Due to the flexibility of HELLO it is not possible to prescribe the way it should be used, this should be determined by the setting. For the HELLO programme as a whole, the process evaluation suggests that it should encourage peer to peer support and a 'critical friend' to probe further when completing the tool. It could be proposed that having established networks is of a benefit so that time is not spent building these relationships, however this is not key. Overall, both models worked well for their settings and in future settings can decide which model would suit them best.

A key outcome of this project is the importance of sharing practice and networking. The majority of the practitioners that were interviewed and/or participated in a focus group discussion noted they wanted the network meetings to continue. Moreover during the project, practitioners commented that they wished they had seen more settings. Thus visiting more than one setting was highlighted as an improvement to the model. These visits and meetings enabled the practitioners to learn from each other. Confidence developed across the project through the chance to share practice, visit other settings and have an expert on hand. Networking as part of the HELLO programme is crucial.

'I think if we were to do the project again it would definitely be something to do [visit settings] because they tell you about all the things they do but you see it in pictures, would definitely be useful. You can't picture it.' (Area C)

For HELLO to be a success it needs a strong lead to develop relationships, ensure settings understand the tool, provide ideas and if needed host training. A longer time period is needed; practitioners felt a lot had been crammed in. But overall, practitioners were positive about the tool, it enabled them to reflect on their practice and develop supportive relationships.

'The actual fact that the tool made you sit down and evaluate practice and time to think before you did something.' (Area B)

To improve the HELLO audit tool, critical questions need to be included to ask more probing questions so that practitioners can truly reflect on their practice and drill down in the focus areas of the tool. Network meetings are key to HELLO to allow settings to share ideas and exchange advice on problems faced in a forum which would not have been possible had it not been for the project. For the implementation of the tool the data gathered suggests the following are important:
- sharing the project with all staff,
- openness to share ideas both internally and externally
- critical framework, being prepared to ask deep level questioning
- a strong lead in the setting and area for the project to be a success

In summary, all of the settings included in the three focus areas benefitted from taking part in HELLO as documented. This evaluation concludes that HELLO is a flexible programme and that the audit tool focuses on three key areas of development and offers a way to change current practices, unlike other audit tools. Furthermore, HELLO was unique in comparison to currently available audit tools by including parent partnerships. The most beneficial part of the project for practitioners was developing a supportive network to share ideas, worries and successes, and these networks are to continue after the project. Based on the evaluation the following recommendations can be made:

- Further roll out of the HELLO tool due to positive findings.
- To continue with the evaluation of the HELLO project due to different implementation models.
- HELLO audit tool requires further critical questions to probe current practices to develop reflective practice.

- The HELLO toolkit resources need to be relevant, up-to-date and easy to access.
- Guidance on how to collate evidence of impact is needed.
- Peer-to-peer support and setting visits are a key element of the HELLO programme and should be encouraged.

Acknowledgement: We would like to thank all the nursery settings and the expert leads for enabling us to undertake the evaluation.