TALK OF THE TOWN

Executive Summary

Key points on the impact of Talk of the Town:
A community lead approach to supporting children and young people's speech, language and communication

'Talk of the Town is a powerful approach for improving speech, language and communication amongst children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This in turn offers encouraging possibilities for improving educational outcomes more generally and, in the longer term, the life chances of young people.'
Ainscow, M., Gallannaugh, F. and Kerr, K. (2012) *An Evaluation of The Communication Trust's 'Talk of the Town' Project.* Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester

The Communication Trust
Every child understood

Executive Summary

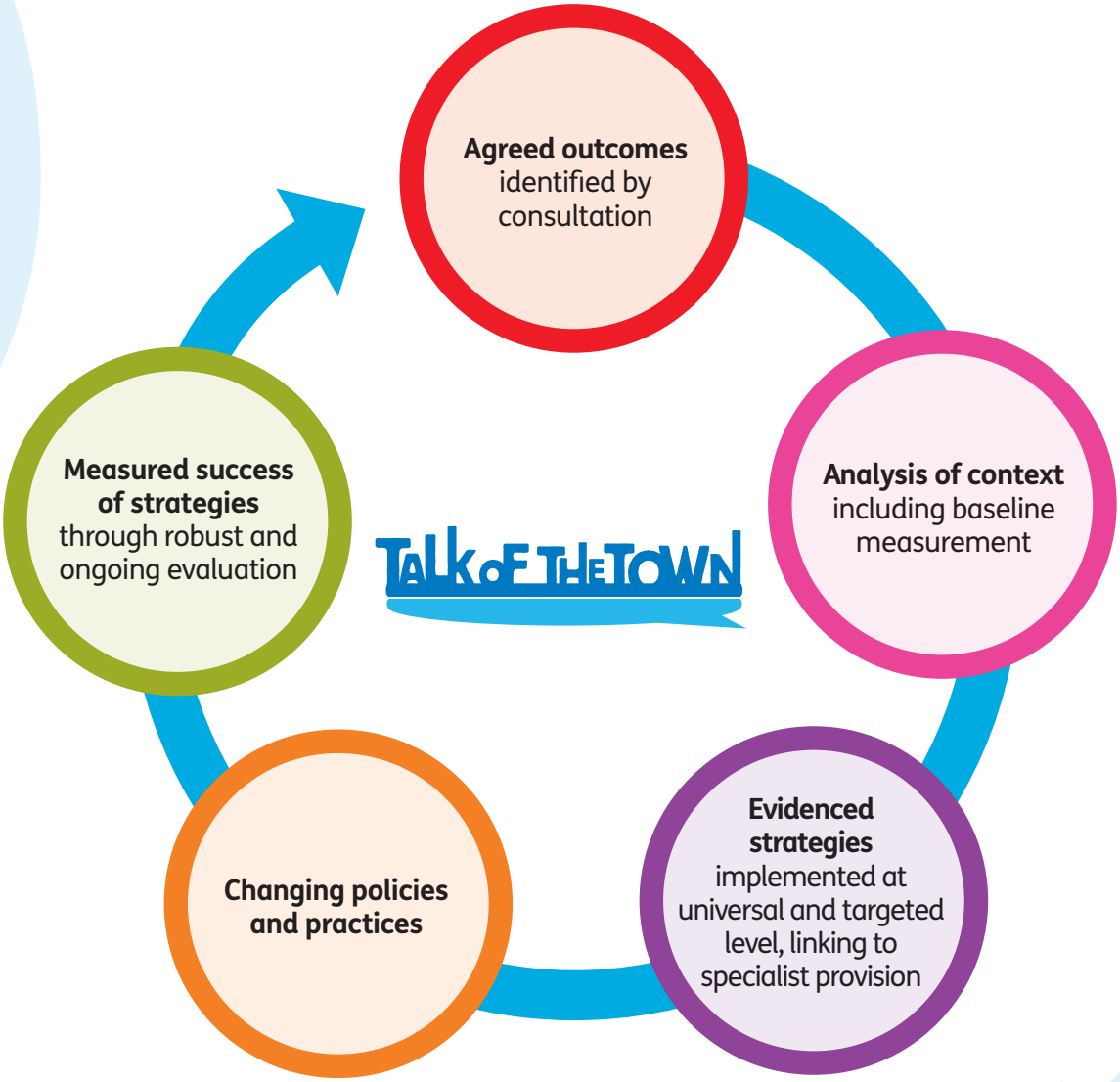
Talk of the Town is an integrated, community led approach to supporting speech, language and communication in children and young people. It was piloted in an area of social deprivation in Manchester from April 2011-September 2012 with 4 key aims;

1. Early identification of children and young people with speech, language and communication needs
2. Joint working between parents and practitioners across health and education
3. Positive outcomes for children and young people with improved speech, language and communication skills
4. A sustainable approach, so that policy and practice continues to support positive outcomes

A full evaluation report for the pilot has recently been released, outlining the positive impact of the project against original baselines, with tangible improvements and shifts in policy and practice across project aims. This executive summary outlines the key findings from the full evaluation report which is available at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/talkofthetown

The Talk of the Town Model

Talk of the Town offers a systematic approach to supporting speech, language and communication. Alongside key principles of practice, TOTT follows a systematic process to embed strategies and achieve measurable positive outcomes, as indicated below.



Key points: baseline measurements

An initial needs analysis was undertaken to provide baseline measurements against each of the aims and to offer insight into the breadth of SLCN across the locality, shaping the content of the programme;

- More than a quarter of 3-4 year olds in the schools' nursery classes had standardised scores below 70 – a level which would meet the criteria for a Statement of Special Educational Needs in many local authorities
- 27% of children sampled in Key Stage 1 tested at this 'severely delayed' level
- There was a similar picture in Key Stage 2, with poor vocabulary emerging as a particular issue and half the children tested having significant difficulties
- At secondary level the incidence of difficulties was even higher; a staggering 50% of thirteen year olds assessed had significant language difficulties
- Staff from across the Federation despite good practice, were under identifying children's SLCN at up to 50%.

Key points: outcomes

Evaluation, compiled from a series of sources including pre and post standardised assessments and an independent academic report by Manchester University, showed positive outcomes across all aims.

1. Early Identification

TOTT is successful in ensuring the early identification of children and young people with SLCN. This is evidenced by;

- Increased skills and knowledge in identifying children's SLCN with under identification falling from between 31-50% at the beginning of the project to 5-15% at the end
- Policies and procedures embedded into practice enabling identification and support for pupils, including the use of identification tools, working with parents and continued staff training

2. Joint working

TOTT is successful in supporting joint working between practitioners across health and education and parents ensuring better outcomes for children and young people. This is evidenced by;

- Changes in practice resulting in a widening of partners embedding speech, language and communication into practice both new and old including; early years settings, museums and galleries, local parent forums, national organisations such as O2 Think Big and National Literacy Trust
- Parents who became engaged in their child's communication development, taking part in ambassador projects and communication supportive sessions run across the Federation
- Widespread support and impact of the partnership with the local NHS Speech and Language Therapist seconded to the schools as part of the project.

3. Outcomes for children

TOTT resulted in positive outcomes for children and young people with improved speech, language and communication skills evidenced by a range of qualitative and quantitative data;

- Re-assessments undertaken by an independent specialist showed substantial increases in standardised scores on a range of language tests after just one year
- Children's language levels improved across both nurseries; with a 15% overall increase across both schools in children no longer scoring below the expected levels
- In key stage 2 improvements could be seen in language with average scores for each element of language now falling into expected national levels
- In key stage 3, average scores in two of the subtests fell into expected national levels
- Both primary schools improved in Ofsted inspections, achieving 'good with outstanding features'
- An increase of 16% of staff in each school who now felt very confident with providing positive strategies to support the speech, language and communication development of children.

4. Sustainability

TOTT is successful in ensuring a sustainable approach, so that policy and practice continues to support positive outcomes as evidenced by;

- Schools' indication that strategies introduced by TOTT were easily embedded into daily-life by building on current practice and enhanced by specialist expertise
- Joint commissioning of a Band 6 speech and language therapist for the next 3 years
- An embedded speech, language and communication 16 year plan sustaining the strategies initiated with responsibility for speech and language given to senior staff
- Continued support commissioned from The Communication Trust with 26 learners on course to complete the Level 3 Qualification in speech, language and communication by March 2013 developing a core of champions for communication that will remain with the federation.

'A considerable strength of the TOTT approach is that is has built on existing good practice, showing how, with just a subtle change in focus, SLC can be made central to a school's practices, and owned and driven by schools themselves... Overall TOTT led to significant changes in the thinking and practices of practitioners.'
Ainscow et al, (2012)

Summary

TOTT ensures changes in policy and practice, implementing and embedding a community wide approach to supporting all children's communication. TOTT has immediate impact, improving children's speech, language and communication as well as staff confidence, skills and knowledge in identifying SLCN and supporting children's communication development through sustainable interventions.

The uniqueness of TOTT is in its ability to permeate positive practice in speech, language and communication, building on current practice and utilising existing resource. It empowers settings to initiate, lead and implement strategies that are suitable to their community, based on a robust needs analysis and expert guidance, support and evidenced based interventions.

TOTT is a true community, supportive approach to children's communication development.

Next steps

The Talk of the Town model has now been refined in light of key learning from the pilot. Funding and partnership is now being sought to implement the model in both new areas and across different types of settings. If you would like more information please contact ewagg@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

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A project run by
The Communication Trust
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