

LENS Project: May 2017 Update Report

First of all, we would like to say a big thank you to all the staff, parents and children at our recruited settings. All the staff have made us all very welcome and we have really appreciated the help that you have given us when recruiting parents and working with the children. This report is to give you an idea of what we have accomplished in Phase 1 of the project and what we are planning for Phase 2.

Phase 1

Setting recruitment

We have recruited 41 Early Years settings, of which 40 had parents who consented for their children to participate. These 40 participating settings are distributed across three counties in the North West of England. These settings are broadly representative of English Early Years provision with 3 settings (7.5%) being maintained nursery schools (4% nationally), 24 (60%) being private or voluntary nurseries or preschools (60% nationally), 12 (30%) being nursery classes within a maintained school (31% nationally) and 1 (2.5%) being a nursery class within an independent school (2% nationally). The settings are located in a diverse range of localities. According to the postcode index of multiple deprivation 15 (37.5%) settings are located in areas with high levels of deprivation (deciles 1 to 3), 11 settings (27.5%) in areas of medium deprivation (deciles 4 to 7) and 14 (35%) in areas of low deprivation (deciles 8 to 10).

Child recruitment and number skills assessments

We received parental consent from the parents of 302 children. Of these 302 parents, 297 had children in the target age bracket and completed and returned the questionnaire. The questionnaire gives us demographic information (e.g. age, ethnicity, parental qualifications, etc.), information about the amount of time the child spends at preschool and information about the home learning environment.

Of the 297 eligible children, 280 have completed all of the early number skills assessments at their preschool setting this spring term. The children completed seven different activities that give us baseline information about their counting skills, understanding of written numbers and ability to perform simple calculations with the help of concrete objects. When we revisit the children in their Reception classes, we will reassess these skills to see how their early number skills have developed.

Phase 2

We may have already started Phase 2 at your setting. If not we will be contacting you about it soon. Phase 2 has two key components the setting observations and the children's language and cognitive assessments.

Observations

The purpose of the observations is to get an indication of the types of activities and interactions the children experience at their preschool setting. We use a standardised observation schedule to do this. The observation requires a member of the team to visit each setting for three hours. For some settings two observers will visit, this is simply to ensure inter-rater reliability (i. e. that all observers are recording the observations consistently). The settings that have dual observers are randomly allocated. The observations should not cause any disruption to your everyday routine – we are just looking to get a ‘snapshot’ of your typical activities.

Language and cognitive assessments

We are aiming to complete all of the language and cognitive assessments with the participating children by the end of July. We assess four different skills. We are interested in these skills, because we believe that they may support the development of children’s early number skills.

Skill	Typical tasks
Vocabulary	Naming pictures Choosing which picture best matches a spoken word
Phonological awareness (perceiving the individual sounds in spoken words)	Identifying words that rhyme Identifying words that start with the same initial sounds
Non-verbal reasoning	Choosing the picture that completes a pattern Deciding which picture is most similar to a given picture
Inhibition (the ability to inhibit a primed response)	A computerised version of ‘Simon Says’ where attention must be paid to a cue to withhold a response

Particular aspects of the home or preschool environment may support the development of these skills. We are especially interested in the extent to which aspects of the environment, language and cognitive skills are related to the growth in children’s early number skills.

Next steps

At the moment, we are busily entering the Phase 1 data into a database. Given that this is progressing at the same time as the Phase 2 testing, we anticipate that it should be completed in June 2017 at which point we will begin our initial analyses. To start with, we will be looking at associations between the information we gathered using the parental questionnaire and the children’s number skills before moving on to analyse the Phase 2 data. We hope to be able to share our initial results with you in autumn 2017.



Thank you once again for your participation.

Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the team if you have any questions about the project.

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