PACT (Parents and Children Together)

PACT is an early language programme for parents to deliver to their child in the home. Parents are provided with structured activities and resources (e.g. storybooks), and deliver the programme to their child every day for 20 minutes (5 sessions per week) over 30 weeks of teaching. PACT incorporates three key components designed to promote children’s oral language development: 1) Shared reading: parents read books with their child using strategies which support verbal interaction and active engagement; 2) Vocabulary instruction: selected words are taught using interactive activities to promote understanding and expression; 3) Narrative (storytelling): activities include sequencing, summarising and telling/retelling stories.

This trial will focus on schools in the north-west of England.

Why are we funding it?

PACT has promising evidence of impacts from a recent RCT led by its developer, and funded by the Nuffield Foundation. This study involved 208 pre-school children (aged 3-years) and their parents in 22 children’s centres. Children were randomly allocated to receive either the oral language programme or an active treatment control programme targeting motor skills and self-care. PACT produced improvements in children’s language skills at immediate post-test, which were maintained 6 months later. The study also reported improvements in some early literacy skills at delayed follow up. Immediate gains in narrative were found though these had faded at follow-up. EEF is funding this trial to build the evidence further, by evaluating the programme in schools, and with a larger sample.

How are we evaluating it?

The programme will be evaluated by a team from the University of Durham, as a randomised controlled trial in 45 schools with nursery classes. The focus will be on children aged 3, with parents randomly allocated within settings to receive the programme or not. Outcomes in language will be measured at the end of the programme and in a delayed post-test in Reception. A process evaluation will be conducted to understand how the programme is implemented, and to gather the views of teachers and parents.

When will the evaluation report be due?

The evaluation report will be published in Autumn 2021.