



Talk To Your Baby

Talk To Your Baby – Smile, Talk and Listen: doing our best for babies

Conference report

On Monday 18 October 2010 Talk To Your Baby (TTYB) held a one-day national conference at Church House, London. The conference shared new thinking and a wide range of initiatives to help ensure that all new babies have excellent support to become confident communicators. A wide range of early years practitioners attended the conference with over 250 delegates attending in total. The conference was organised by the National Literacy Trust and supported by Nursery World.

Jean Gross, Communication Champion, began her talk by explaining that the Communication Champion role was born out of the Bercow Review of Speech and Language Services in 2008. Thanks in part to the work of Talk To Your Baby, Jean said she was convinced the role of communication champion could have a significant impact and upon taking the job set out her own priorities:

- Contributing to policy – contributions to the ongoing reviews, including the review of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Graham Allen MP's commission into Early Intervention
- Raising awareness – of the importance of speech, language and communication
- National Year – the main topic of the conference speech
- Influencing local commissioning – for example, by talking to local leaders about multi-agency approaches
- Spreading good practice – Jean said she would ensure that the good practice she sees around the country is passed on through networks.

Jean spoke about some of the issues that had emerged from the local meetings and visits she had already taken part in. There are a number of brilliant schemes in the early years, which demonstrate what can be achieved by a strategically planned community-wide campaign. Stoke Speaks Out is a prime example of this, and while that scheme was set up with a degree of capital investment there are now a number of similar schemes that have been set up with current budget constraints in mind, for example in Leicester. There is also a significant fear that budget cuts will lead local services such as health and education to “patrol their own borders”, something which would be detrimental to the future of speech, language and communication.

With these issues in mind Jean talked about her specific asks for local authorities. These revolve around a single three to five year plan, which takes in both the National Year and takes account of how services are commissioned in the longer term. Additionally, these strategies will need championing by a senior manager and a multi-agency local planning group to move the plans forward.

Ideally each strategy would contain input from everyone in the children's workforce, as lessons from existing practice indicate this is essential, as well as shared messages given to parents and carers and practical training that can change practitioner behaviour. To be successful the strategy should contain three elements: universal, targeted and specialist support. By way of example Jean mentioned Ealing council, which has identified the travelling community for targeted help and trained someone from their traveller education team to help deliver Every Child A Talker.

Clearly not every authority will currently have a strategy; however, this does not mean that nothing can be done. In these areas it is very likely that speech, language and communication work can contribute to a local priority such as "narrowing the gap". Using data on local needs, which will be on the local authority website, existing research practitioners might be able to make a business and economic case for why these services are essential, backed up by local publicity and visits to settings for councillors and other elected members. The combination of these things will help to showcase both the excellent work being done and the importance of speech, language and communication needs.

Having spoken about the hopes for long term strategy, Jean moved on to talk more specifically about the National Year, and revealed the name "Hello" and the logo for the year for the first time. The year will look at communication throughout childhood from "bump to 19" and will hope to raise awareness of the issues and what can be done about them. Specific target audiences will vary from authority to authority, some will have parents of one to five year olds, while for others school staff might be a key priority, but for every identified target group a simple grid was shown which identified the desired behaviour change and the motivations, with the barriers to overcome.

Jean was able to set out some of the messages that will be in the Year including that communication is the key 21st century skill and the key to a better life. The national campaign will run in themed months, beginning with an introductory 'Hello' month in January which will be followed by two months of Early Chatter Matters in February and March. Throughout the year there will be press campaigns, celebrity and corporate involvement, including from BT, and at the end of the year there will be awards.

To finish, Jean explained the next steps, working up the Year's programme of activities, branding and key messages and gave the email address of the newly announced Hello campaign (www.hello.org.uk) where people can sign up to the Communication Trust newsletter. Jean also said she is looking to expand the database of ideas and best practice and would love to be contacted about ideas and examples (enquiries@thecommunicationchampion.org.uk).

Liz Attenborough then presented the Face to Face research project results. Face to Face is a two year project funded by the Department for Education's Children, Young People and Families Fund that set out to "identify key messages for parents and caregivers in relation to communicating with babies and young children, and examine the most effective ways of promoting the messages." The goal was to find out how messages get to new parents and what kind of messages change behaviour in "the right way". An interesting fact highlighted by Liz was that the word infant is derived from the Latin for speechless.

Liz described the literature review, which was undertaken by a team at the University of Dundee in November 2009, as aiming to provide a base, of the already existing research, which the sector could buy into. It synthesised evidence from a wide range of subjects and perspectives including: education, psychology, linguistics, social science, medicine and parenting. It also looked to review and identify the key barriers facing parents and carers in communicating with babies.

The literature review identified three key areas;

- contingency, which is like the serve and return of communication, being tuned into a baby or, as Liz put it, “sensitive responsiveness”
- nature and type of interactions between parent and baby, the gesture, gaze, touch and sound of communication
- the home literacy environment, including EPPE research which found that the home literacy environment was more important than socio-economic indicators when it came to literacy achievement

The highlights of the literature review were: that parents tended to over estimate how much time they spent talking to their children; later language ability is predicted by early parent talking; most talking between parents and children two to 48 months happens at the end of the day; even in the first six months child to child communication plays an important role; and parents engagement depends on the trust, rapport and respect they have for the professionals they deal with.

Liz discussed the focus group research portion of Face to Face, carried out by Solutions, between May and July 2010, with groups of parents and grandparents with children between the ages of birth and three. A consumer clinic was also held in a shop front in a town centre, where harder to reach families were encouraged to drop in and be interviewed.

The headlines from the research were supportive of the findings of the literature review. It was found that:

- parents’ driving force is their desire to give their children the best possible start
- parents do not seek out information about communication but are interested to hear about it
- brain development is interesting and “new news” to parents
- “Baby time” is not prioritised over chores and talking is not a top of mind concern for parents
- parents want to be told what to do and how to do it because they do not want to get it wrong

Of great interest to Liz and probably many of the other attendees is the fact that parents do not like the idea that they are their children’s first teacher and find the thought a scary notion.

So, what did the Face to Face research discover? It found that communicating with babies is not considered a diarised activity, ie it is not something which is approached as an exercise but rather as something that just happens. Parents think that they spend a lot more time than they actually do talking to their babies and when they look back on the time

they spend talking to their babies they realise they do a lot of talking at, and not with, their babies.

But, where do parents get information? They use the internet pre-birth, with pregnancy planners and other online information sources featuring prominently pre-birth. After birth parents, now time poor, find that the internet is often a resource they use only when they think their baby might have a problem. Health practitioners, postnatal groups and other mums become the trusted sources of information for new parents.

Liz highlighted additional barriers to communication, that the literature review had also highlighted, that included that parents fear doing it wrong and question how much is enough, prioritise chores while at home and lack confidence in their interactions with their babies.

Knowing where parents get information from and what the barriers to communication are the research participants were asked about specific messages. The stand out message for participants was: "Babies are born with brains that have a massive capacity for learning and most brain development happens in the first two years of life", with additional information of specific examples of activities around singing, smiling, listening and talking. But, as Liz pointed out the fear with any of these messages is that they are too soft and suddenly parents see them, feel good and think, "well, that messaging is for other parents because my baby is already brilliant."

Other noteworthy findings are that while parents are already communicating with their children through talking and singing, they just don't realise the value of it in developing their child's communication abilities. Parents want to know milestones and be given specific instructions on how to make the most of their communication time. And the idea that communicating early will help with their child's later social skills was well liked. Highlighting the benefits to the child is the key motivating factor for parents.

Liz highlighted one heartening fact. Some parents who participated in the research reported in follow up interviews that they had started to change their behaviour to get more out of their communication with their children because the research had raised the issue in their minds.

The final speaker before the morning break was **Sylvia Baddeley**, a bonding and attachment specialist midwife and child development consultant, who has worked closely with the Stoke Speaks Out project. Sylvia's presentation focused on the importance of skin-to-skin contact between newborn babies and their carers.

Sylvia began by saying that touch is the first form of attachment between baby and carer. The human face and voice are very important in aiding development and secure attachment relationships. From eye-to-eye contact through to being held closely by a parent or carer, all forms of initial attachment are fundamental to a baby's development. Sensory input via the skin informs a baby about the world around them and sends messages about the carer who is holding them. Despite the vital importance of early skin contact, Sylvia went on to explain that this importance is not always recognised by parents, practitioners or policy makers.

Throughout Sylvia's talk she was keen to stress that knowledge of the importance of touch and very early bonding is not new. She used quotes from researcher Ashley Montagu, from studies released in the 1960s and 1970s, to illustrate this point. For example: "It is in large part the stimulation of his skin by touch which enables the child to emerge from his own skin," which suggests that experiences shape our brains and our skin is the vehicle that brings all those experiences in early life. This deliberate usage of older references allowed Sylvia to prove how long this information has been available and to illustrate her dismay that, despite this, practitioners are still not widely trained in touch.

The beginnings of attachment happen before birth. According to one of Montagu's studies the mother's voice can be recognised in the womb from 24 weeks and the voice acts as a lifeline in a cacophony of sound within the womb. Sylvia continued this theme to say that in the last few years our understanding of the knowledge that babies are born with has expanded greatly, so that we no longer believe babies are born as a "blank slate", but that they have already learned recognition and attachment in the womb.

Despite our growing knowledge of babies, pre-birth learning and the longstanding evidence base on the importance of touch and attachment, in her professional life Sylvia still hears hospital staff and parents say things like, "you can spoil them by picking them up too much." This lack of knowledge is particularly worrying as at birth a mother needs to cuddle her baby to help stimulate regular respiration and help deep breathing. Infants pick up messages from the way in which they are held, rather than that they are held. Because of the combination of low awareness and the importance of touch and contact Sylvia told the conference that educating parents-to-be and new parents about their baby's need for talking, eye-to-eye contact and skin-to-skin contact should be high on the list of all parent educators and supporters of parents.

Close contact immediately after birth is not just vital because it helps babies adjust to their surroundings, but because of the key impact it has on growth and development. Sylvia went on to say that the impact of a lack of touch on growth and development was tragically illustrated in Romania in the 1980s, where the experiences of children in orphanages had a long lasting and devastating impact on their lives. Researchers who worked with children who had been in Romanian orphanages, and had often been left completely alone, found that even 6-8 years later, and with loving carers in place, some still did not biologically respond to their carers. Furthermore, their growth hormone levels were reduced and many of these children remained small and frail into adolescence. Other factors resulting from a lack of touch include:

- Non-optimal weight gain
- Babies cry more, are less easy to settle
- Brain size is affected in severe deprivation, as 90% of brain's size is complete by age three

The impact of touch deprivation is often overlooked as the negative consequences are not immediately obvious. For this reason it is essential that practitioners are trained properly and are able to pass on this knowledge to new parents, both mothers and fathers.

Before finishing with a lovely video of her daughter-in-law and newborn grandson, Sylvia highlighted some key messages:

1. We cannot hold, nurse or cuddle babies too much in their first years of life
2. We will not spoil them if we do
3. Touch and talk even before birth
4. Frequent skin-to-skin and eye-to-eye contact is fundamental to development
5. Remember that play teaches a child about the world around them and enhances brain development
6. Keeping in touch will help a baby experience the most important touches of their life – their mother's and the rest of their family

Julia Manning Morton presented the work of the Early Childhood Wellbeing Project, a joint project from London Metropolitan University and the National Children's Bureau. The project set out to examine the concept of wellbeing and to enable discussion and debate around the subject. The project also aims to gather evidence about children's wellbeing that will help the early years sector to develop clear principles and practices around wellbeing and to directly influence policy and provision. The project has held several focus groups in early years settings with practitioners (childminders included) and parents and researching wellbeing from a child's perspective by conducting small research groups within some settings.

Julia discussed the difficult topic of the concept of wellbeing which can be hard to pin down because it's a dynamic, which is complex and multi-dimensional. This complexity comes from the fact that all aspects of learning and development are intertwined; meaning that physical health, movement, play and healthy eating are linked into emotional intelligence, feelings of self-worth and belonging. The focus group's discussions about wellbeing centred around the idea that you need to think about it holistically and cross and stretch boundaries.

Interestingly, some practitioners participating in the focus groups found the term "school readiness" insulting and said that schools were often not ready for children. Emotional, social and personal development and learning were viewed as core requirements for wellbeing with the primacy of relationships in early childhood highlighted as very important.

Participants described wellbeing as the core which gives a child a glow and as a frame of a jigsaw which allows all the other pieces to be put into their places.

Julia then went on to discuss the many ways in which wellbeing can be threatened. Discrimination, direct or indirect, affects the wellbeing of children, as does a dissonance of values between wider society and that of the child. The central role of practitioners in providing for the wellbeing of children in their care was also discussed with focus group participants believing that the wellbeing of the practitioner is directly related to the wellbeing of the children in their care. Practitioner wellbeing is dependent on their time to reflect and develop their emotional intelligence.

Julia did acknowledge that wellbeing is not a new concept for many. She ended her presentation by listing the ways through which a child's sense of wellbeing can be enhanced: by having their emotions accepted and understood; having experiences that are congruent with their idea of who they are; families support; having professional carers who are valued and by being respected members of the community.

Dr Kathy Gooch, from Canterbury Christ Church University, presented findings from recent research into the baby room in nursery settings.

Kathy began by setting out some of the thoughts that led to the development of the research project. About 18% of children under one in the UK are cared for in day care settings, and within nurseries almost all of these are in designated baby rooms. However, despite evidence about how formative the first two years of life are, anecdotal evidence suggested the baby room is often staffed by the least experienced and least qualified member of staff. There is also a sense, again anecdotally, that the focus on early years doesn't start until after the first two years of life.

With this in mind the research project was launched with the overarching aim towards improving care in out-of-home settings. As part of the research project, the researchers aimed to provide some professional development opportunities for the practitioners who took part and also to start a sustainable network of practitioners. It was hoped the project would lead to a better understanding of the factors that help or hinder the professional development of staff and to explore the effects of professional development on practice, as well as examining outcomes for babies in rooms where there was a change in professional practice, resulting from participation in the project.

So, beginning with a deliberately small group of ten practitioners from ten nurseries, the researchers began to collect interviews, ran focus groups, online messaging, observed and asked for diaries. This continued for a year before evaluation of the project began.

Kathy moved on to the key findings before summing up with implications for policy and practice. Some of the key issues are:

- a. Practitioners often feel overlooked – some said they were the least valued in the nursery and were isolated, both within nurseries and more widely
 - *It's sad that there's so little about baby rooms*
 - *It's nice to feel we're important* – comment about this research project
 - *You feel isolated in your own environment.*
- b. They have little or no information about baby rooms in other settings
 - *We all have to do the same things but we do them differently*
- c. They are answerable to a range of stakeholders – parents, family members, carers, managers, nursery owners, the local authority, Ofsted
- d. Policy is filtered down – sometimes inaccurately; many practitioners had no first hand knowledge of policy development

Following the project there were impacts on both the practitioners and their settings as well as some tentative impact on outcomes for babies. Kathy said that the practice of filming of practice had had a significant impact on practitioners, who had seen themselves at work for the first time. Some were made more aware of their interactions with the babies and of the babies' interactions with them as well. In turn, some of the managers had noticed an impact on practitioners with one manager saying, "She's become more relaxed at going with the children and accepting they're all individuals."

While the researchers are cautious about overstating any impact for babies there were some tentative changes noted, including increased interaction with babies, increased recognition of individual needs of babies, closer one-to-one interactions, heightened

awareness of relationships with parents and carers, development of reflective practice, all of which are positive things.

Given the positive impact that the research had on practice, and the issues it highlighted in professional identity, Kathy went on to talk about recommendations that the research has highlighted. The first is for more professional support that those in baby rooms as well as more interactions with other professionals. Kathy continued that this should be coupled with a better method for dissemination of policy for those working in baby rooms, as well as a rise in the status of the baby room and a stronger professional voice for baby room practitioners.

Kathy finished by asking some political, philosophical and pedagogical questions which have arisen from the research.

- Why do baby rooms exist at all? – Ofsted require them, but the reason is unclear
- Who benefits from baby rooms?
- What do baby rooms provide?
- What should be provided?
- Whose vision should be represented in a baby room?
- Who controls the field of judgement? – by this the researchers mean which research and policy is important in determining baby rooms

The morning ended with a panel of morning speakers which was chaired by Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust. Jonathan highlighted that sometimes the intrinsic value of being a baby is forgotten and that babies haven't been given the importance they deserve in the recent policy discussions.

The first question asked was directed at Sylvia Baddeley: "what influence does hospital health and safety have on newborn care ie babies need to go into cots not in bed with mothers." Sylvia responded that most women leave the hospital quickly and so it isn't too much of an issue. Skin-to-skin research with dads has shown that it's great for dads to hold babies skin-to-skin as this releases a hormone in the men which promotes bonding. Children in care also need skin-to-skin contact and when parents are absent those people who have taken over the care of the child need to step in fully, including ensuring skin-to-skin contact.

Jonathan then asked the panel what their practical wishes for improving parenting skills were. Liz responded that she would like to see maternity leave valued more, including leave for dads. Becoming a parent is amazing, and we need to tell new parents that it's ok to ask about how to be a good parent. Sylvia would like to see maternity leave changed to encourage mothers to leave work at 28 weeks which allows them to go to classes for the three months prior to birth.

An audience member then asked about developing competencies in baby room practitioners. Julia responded that to do a really good job practitioners need a good level of self awareness and maturity. A focus on personal development, inter and intrapersonal skills and emotional learning should be a norm with time for reflection to aid all those things. Kathy thinks that the discourse around babies should be examined, emotional and physical wellbeing need to be talked about.

The first presentation after lunch was given by **Angela Sugden** from Kirklees who talked about 'The Child's Journey', a resource package designed to help new parents in Kirklees. The presentation interspersed excellent clips from the video to accompany the slides.

Angela began by explaining the reasons why the local authority had developed the video. In 2006 the roll out of children's centres in Kirklees highlighted key areas of contact and activity where joined up working between agencies could support and deliver a universal programme of entitlement to children and parents in line with current research and the children's centre core offer. The resource pack is designed around what parents can do, rather than on a deficit model.

Angela explained that the pack was deemed necessary because head teachers and foundation stage coordinators across Kirklees were reporting that many children are arriving at nursery with very poor communication and language development. Angela continued that a recent visit to a children's centre confirmed how much work needed to be done. A range of factors in modern day life, such as television and work commitments, were a hindrance for many parents and children's centres wanted a resource that could show the importance of early communication.

Kirklees wanted to focus on areas they knew could make a difference, for example by ensuring that support reaches parents early, where it can make the most difference. Partnership with parents is also seen as vital to the success of the project.

The Child's Journey begins with the message that the early years of life are crucial for success in later life. The resource pack also acknowledges that parents and carers are the most influential, enduring and important teachers, playmates and protectors in a child's life. Angela said children's centres in Kirklees took the attitude that it is their job to engage parents in their child's journey. The authority hopes the pack will improve outcomes for all children in the authority and will provide a strong platform to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest by breaking the link between disadvantage and low achievement, therefore maximising the impact of children's centres.

The Child's Journey is divided into four components:

- Attachment
- Communication and Language
- Developmental Movement
- Play

Angela said that the four areas were crucial to all children and had been chosen as they are interlinked and together work towards providing the skills, understanding and disposition for growing up successfully. To give an illustration of the messaging within the resource packs Angela spoke in more detail about the communication and language stream.

One of the key challenges for the resource is to support parents' understanding of their child's ability to listen and respond. Children are able to listen and respond from birth and by doing so they learn from example, and it is essential this message reaches all parents. A clip was shown from the DVD that comes in the resource pack, explaining that babies demonstrate the desire and ability to communicate from birth. The DVD continues that

many parents talk to babies while they are still in the womb, something that midwives in the area are trained to talk about and explain.

The communication and language component of “The Child’s Journey” contains the DVD, a professional’s booklet, a toolkit and handbook on communication and language, ‘Let’s Talk’ bags for communication activities in the home and a range of other activities for families.

Angela concluded her presentation by saying that if services work together with parents Kirkless council believe they can make a difference and that by working together they wield the potential to prevent communication difficulties or to minimise their impact on children’s life experiences in the early years and beyond.

Mary Campbell and **Janet Harrison** presented Talk (still) matters! which was conceived at the 2007 Talk To Your Baby conference. It is an aspirational strategy which aims to provide children with the ability to do many things. Of paramount importance is the ability to communicate to make friends and form relationships. The strategy also aims to give children the ability to express their feelings and emotions, use language to express their views and solve their problems, use language for thinking, enjoy reading books and write effectively.

Janet discussed its multi-level, multi-agency strategy and its seven activity streams. The strategy focuses on the child, the family and the wider community through a bottom-up approach with local partners, including parents, through the seven activity streams: a preventative pathway, a training framework, universal screening at 12 and 24 months, actively monitoring language development at three years of age, awareness campaign, partnership with I CAN to improve communication environments through the Early Talk programme and an advisory group to monitor and widen participation.

Janet then listed the progress made in some of the activity streams:

- the preventative pathway has created four age-related language development programmes across all children’s centres
- the training pathway, which is based on the four levels identified in the Speech Language and Communication framework, has aimed to make training more systematic by bringing together all the existing training schemes. The training framework’s next steps is to get language training included in the Foundation Stage NQT as part of induction
- the universal screening activity stream has developed multi-agency screening at age two across all children’s centres. A baseline has been developed for monitoring language development in the September after a child turns three and when they are seven years old
- the awareness campaign has aimed to tackle community level language issues through advertisements on buses, radio and community events.

Mary and Janet finished the presentation by giving the five reasons they believe Talk Matters is working:

1. It started as a bottom-up group with passion and commitment to communication

2. It has a strategic approach in which they continually analysed their approach and activity, which allowed for filtering out of inappropriate initiatives and moulding of others
3. Having an information officer allowed them to make the connections with publicity networks
4. They didn't start from scratch; they used trusted local practitioners to evaluate what was and is going on
5. They haven't lost the passion of the bottom-up approach.

Samantha Chapman, lead early years adviser in Devon, presented Devon's Talking Tale. The presentation looked at ways in which Devon has used a variety of speech, language and communication projects to improve outcomes for children across the borough.

An entertaining introduction was followed by some context about the challenges facing Devon. As a large rural county, which takes three hours to travel north to south across, Devon has particular challenges which aren't found in many smaller urban authorities. Areas of deprivation in Devon are more dispersed and in some ways harder to reach.

With this in mind, Devon needed a strategy that could raise the profile of speech, language and communication needs and provide clear focus and support for the local authority. Additionally, Devon County Council wanted something that could provide a training and accreditation process with a joint role for education and speech and language therapists. Using the I CAN model as a starting point enabled staff in the authority to discuss the most suitable way forward and to act as a vehicle to start professional discussions.

The strategy was given a boost by the introduction of both capital and strategic direction from Every Child A Talker. The initial influx of capital allowed Devon to pilot their strategy in 20 children's centres. The funding from Every Child A Talker has further supported the existing work, which has continued to expand. A recent training opportunity for childminders in Devon saw 160 workers give up their Saturdays to take part in the training.

Samantha recognised that funding would be more difficult to find in the near future and said this would cause some difficulties. However, she finished by giving a short list of hopes and dreams for the future of the programme, which she thought could be achieved. These included:

- The county-wide strategy embedded in the Children's and Young People's Plan
- Better understanding among practitioners of normal speech and language development
- A movement away from a variety of schemes and into one speech, language and communication strategy

Along with these general aims Samantha would like speech, language and communication to be renamed communication, language and speech to more accurately reflect the relative priority of the skills.

The last presentation of the day was given by **Catherine Ellison**, Sheffield Partners in Literacy Coordinator and **Lucy Kitchener**, Wiltshire Partners in Literacy coordinator. Partners in Literacy (PiL) is a pilot, funded by the Department for Education and delivered by the National Literacy Trust, which looks to support literacy in the home for both parents

and children through coordinating local services. PiL uses a multi-agency partnership with joined-up-working to reach parents and considers early intervention and parental involvement in the home as vital.

The PiL framework for local authorities is audience focused; local data is used to identify priority families and track attitudes and behaviours. Locally existing provisions are coordinated, joined-up and easily accessible. PiL also focuses on service improvement to best meet the needs of local families, targeting families with the greatest need.

Working in partnership is at the heart of PiL delivery. Partners are those who have been identified as working with families for whom improved literacy can have the biggest impact. Developing networks and extending partnerships is part of the PiL framework and it has led to thinking around developing partnerships along non-traditional lines.

Sheffield and Wiltshire described how they are currently putting the PiL model into practice with some interesting results. In Wiltshire they have delivered training on how to signpost people to literacy support services for floating housing support staff, those people who work on estates like “sparkies”. Sheffield has used the PiL model to work with carers who are engaged in fostering. Research revealed this group was not accessing children’s centres because they did not view them as a resource for them. PiL has developed further training opportunities for those working with fostering services and created a “Literacy Bag” loan scheme in which carers are sent home with a bag of literacy activities they can do in the home.

The day ended with closing remarks from Liz Attenborough and Jonathan Douglas. Jonathan used the end of the conference as a chance to thank Liz for all the work she has done over the past eight years on the TTYB campaign, as she is leaving her role.

Appendix A: **Speaker biographies**

Liz Attenborough was a children's book publisher for 24 years, including 12 years as Publisher of Puffin Books. From January 1998 to September 1999 she was Director of the National Year of Reading, a Government campaign to encourage reading for pleasure across the community. The following year she studied for an MA in Child Studies at King's College, London. In addition to her work on Talk To Your Baby, which began in January 2003, Liz has been involved with a number of different charities and organisations, all to do with children or reading or both. She is also a primary school governor.

Sylvia Baddeley is the only bonding and attachment specialist midwife in the UK. She pioneered Aquanatal, has published many articles on exercise during pregnancy, and is a complementary therapist and baby massage instructor. She firmly believes that how babies are parented and the type of relationship that develops in those early weeks and months has a profound and lasting effect on communication, brain development and speech and language development. She regularly lectures to student midwives, student nurses and early years staff.

Mary Campbell and **Janet Harrison** have worked together on Leicester's strategic communication plan since October 2007, following their attendance at the Talk To Your Baby conference that year. Their reflections from that day convinced them of the need for a more consistent and cohesive approach that engages the whole community and brings about long-term, sustainable change in how adults communicate with children. Their presentation represents the development and progress made by dedicated early years practitioners working across the city as an embedded priority within their children's centre strategy.

Samantha Chapman is Lead Early Years Adviser for Learning and Development in Devon. Part of her role is to support speech, language and communication development across the county. She has worked in education for 15 years and, following an opportunity to cover a maternity leave in a school nursery, knew that early years was where she belonged. Since then she has worked across a range of early years provision and as a consultant within the local authority, never tiring of the inspiration that young children provide.

Catherine Ellison knew from a very young age that she wanted to work with young children and families and since qualifying as a nursery nurse in 1998 has worked full time in the field of early years. Previous jobs have included working in a private nursery, as a nanny, as an early years practitioner in a local authority nursery and as a parent involvement worker. She also managed the PPEL (Parents as Partners in Early Learning) project for Sheffield in 2008. Whilst working full time she has also embarked on a learning journey and recently graduated with a BA Hons in Early Childhood Studies. It will not be a surprise that her area of expertise is early years and she has a good understanding and knowledge of children's centres, family support and parent partnership working. The thing that drives her is the thought of making a difference to a child's life, so children are always at the heart of her practice.

Kathy Gouch has been involved in education for more than 30 years. She has taught in infant, primary and middle schools, kindergarten and now in higher education, where her focus is on supporting Masters students and research. Research interests have ranged

from understanding early literacy development, examining issues relating to boys and reading, looking critically at what may constitute a "relational pedagogy", play, professionalism and, currently, who cares for babies - all of which actually connect quite closely. Kathy's most recent publication is *Towards Excellence in Early Years Education: Exploring Narratives of Experience*, published by Routledge.

Jean Gross is England's Communication Champion. Her role is to promote the importance of good speech, language and communication skills for all children, and coordinate efforts to improve services for children who need extra help in learning to communicate.

A former teacher, educational psychologist and manager of local authority children's services, Jean was until 2005 a senior director in the Primary National Strategy, responsible for its work on overcoming barriers to achievement. Here she led the development of the influential SEAL approach to social and emotional learning. She has written many bestselling books on children's issues, directed the charity responsible for the Every Child a Reader and Every Child Counts programmes, and frequently acts as an adviser to government.

Lucy Kitchener is Partners in Literacy Coordinator for Wiltshire. Lucy's background is as an Area Children's and Young Person's Librarian for North Wiltshire and Kennet. She has also worked as the Reading Lifelines/Everybody's Reading Project Manager for Stockport Library Service and a Project Worker for The Gap day centre for young homeless people in Oxford. She has two young children and is passionate about the benefits of talking, singing, playing, scribbling, listening and reading with children.

Julia Manning-Morton is Programme Director For Early Childhood (taught courses) at London Metropolitan University, where she teaches on the Early Childhood Studies Degree, the Education (Early Years) MA and the NPQICL. Before moving to the University, Julia worked as an early years practitioner, manager, adviser and inspector across a range of settings for children from birth to eight years. She qualified as an NNEB in 1976 and completed an MA in Early Childhood Education with Care in 2000.

For much of this time Julia's main focus has been on developing practice with children from birth to three and in 2003 Julia co-authored *Key Times for Play: the first three years* with Maggie Thorp. *Key Times: A Framework for Developing High Quality Provision for Children from Birth to Three*, also written with Maggie Thorp, was published in 2006. This was the result of a five-year research project with the London Borough of Camden. Since 2003 Julia has been part of a multi-disciplinary group at the Tavistock Centre for Human Relations in London, developing training materials to support practitioners supporting babies' and young children's emotional wellbeing, which she has delivered in several London boroughs. Julia's current work is a research project in partnership with the National Children's Bureau exploring concepts of wellbeing in the early childhood field in dialogue with practitioners, parents and children.

Angela Sugden is an Early Learning Manager in Kirklees. She has extensive experience working as an early years practitioner in the voluntary, private and maintained sectors. Over the past 10 years she has led early years teams and managed Sure Start children's centres, working on one of the first 60 trailblazer programmes. In 2006 Angela went on to develop the children's centre at Staincliffe and Healey in Batley, Birstall and Birkenshaw

locality, where The Child's Journey was born. She has recently researched the opportunities that babies and young children have to experience the outdoors in day care, with childminders and with parents. For this she was awarded an MA in Early Education and Care from Sheffield University. She also holds Early Years Professional Status (EYP) and the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Children's Centre Leadership (NPQICL). She became an Early Learning Manager for the Spen Valley locality in 2007 and has been working on the development of The Child's Journey in Kirklees since then.