

# Exploring the impact of a story-based teacher training programme on language and early literacy in 4- and 5-year-olds

Visser, M., O'Carroll, S., Oakhill, J., Cain, K., & de Wet, K. (2023). Exploring the impact of a story-based teacher training programme on language and early literacy in 4- and 5-year-olds. *Teachers at the core: Was the programme useful, feasible and easy to implement?* Wordworks: Cape Town.

## Teachers at the core: Was the programme useful, feasible and easy to implement?

This is the second in a series of five research briefs that explore the impact of Little Stars, a story-based teacher training programme on language and early literacy in 4- and 5-year-olds. This brief focuses on the effectiveness of the training and the teachers' feedback on their learning and implementation.

### Training of teachers

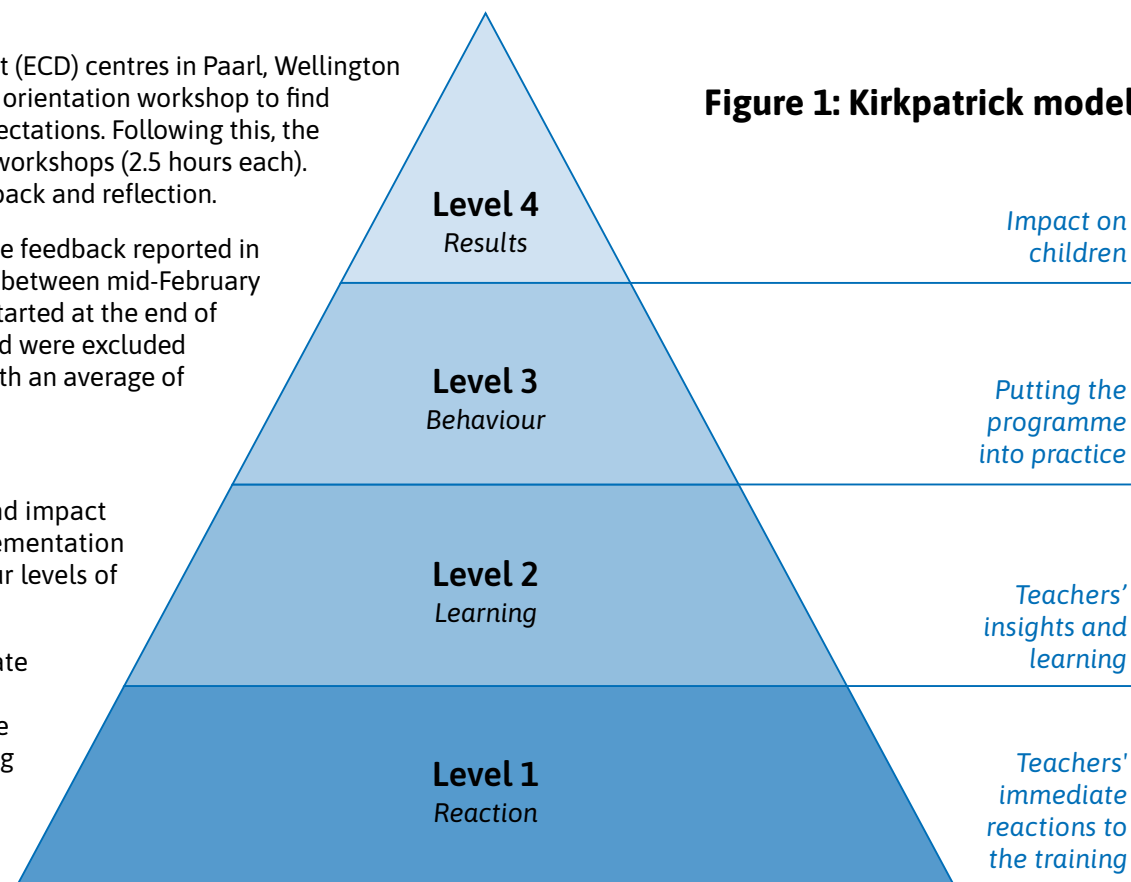
We recruited isiXhosa and Afrikaans teachers from Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in Paarl, Wellington and Khayelitsha, through local ECD forums and NGOs. The teachers attended an orientation workshop to find out about the Little Stars programme and the research project and to clarify expectations. Following this, the teachers participated in two full-day training workshops and then four monthly workshops (2.5 hours each). The training ended with a graduation event that included opportunities for feedback and reflection.

The teaching programme covers a full school year, lasting 36 weeks. However, the feedback reported in this brief is from the 26 teachers in the intervention group who received training between mid-February and the end of August: 26 weeks of the school year. (The control group training started at the end of August.) Two teachers in the sample attended less than half of the workshops and were excluded from the study. The attendance rate for the remaining teachers was excellent, with an average of 6.2 out of 7 sessions.

### Evaluation framework

We used Kirkpatrick's model<sup>1</sup> as a framework for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the training on various levels. As pivotal stakeholders in the successful implementation of the Little Stars programme, teachers were at the forefront of three of the four levels of evaluation.

This research brief explores Levels 1 to 3 of the Kirkpatrick model. We investigate whether the teachers enjoyed the training, felt motivated and perceived the training and classroom programme as useful and valuable (Level 1). We explore the teachers' reports about what they learnt and their insights about how young children learn language (Level 2). We also report on their perceptions of how the programme influenced their classroom practice (Level 3).



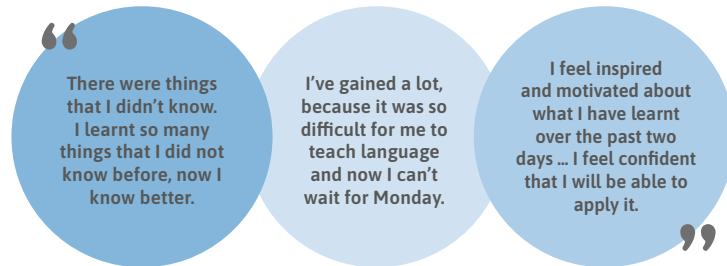
<sup>1</sup> Kirkpatrick, D., & Kirkpatrick, J. (2006). *Evaluating training programmes: The four levels*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

## Findings

We present our findings in three sections: 1) Immediate reactions to the training, 2) Teacher insights and learning, and 3) Putting the programme into practice.

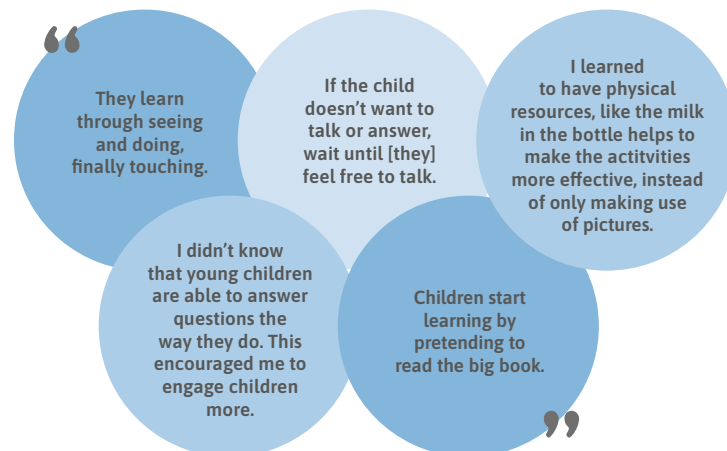
### 1. Immediate reactions to the training

- Teachers rated the facilitation of the training very positively; 86% of them considered it excellent.
- Over 80% of teachers rated the training as worth their time, and highly valuable.
- Motivation and preparedness: Teachers showed high motivation and preparedness throughout the training: on a scale of 1 to 7, 90% rated their motivation as 6 or 7 and 92% rated their preparedness as 6 or 7.

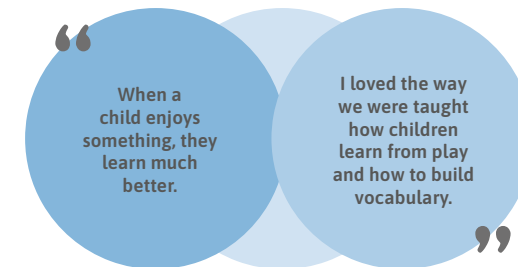


### 2. Teacher insights and learning

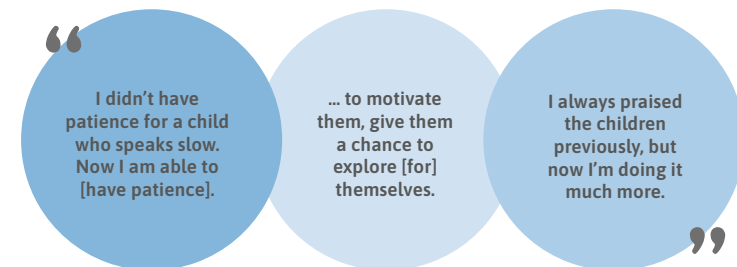
- Teachers indicated that they received more than just training on how to follow the programme. They also gained valuable knowledge about how children learn, and how language and early literacy develops.



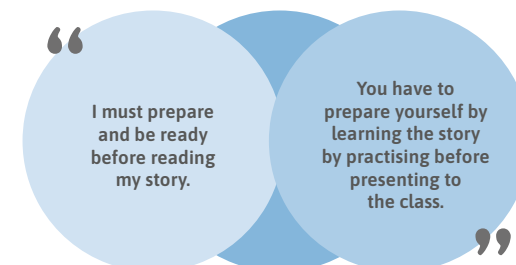
- The importance of **engaging the children for learning** was a recurring theme. Teachers said the programme taught them the importance and value of making learning fun and actively involving children during learning activities.



- Some teachers' feedback reflected a shift in their attitude to teaching and their intentions to **interact** more with the children.



- Finally, while reflecting on their learning, many teachers also referred to the importance of preparing for language and literacy teaching.



## Findings continued...

### 3. Putting the programme into practice

Teachers indicated that they were using what they had learnt in training and were putting the programme into practice.

- Teachers reported using 70% of the provided stories and most programme activities. Feedback showed that the extent of their programme implementation improved over time.
- Challenges revolved around the little books and role play activities in the programme:
  - For some teachers, photocopying the little books was a challenge; others reported that children found it difficult to fold the little books.
  - Role play also presented challenges, such as ensuring equal opportunities for all children and the activity taking a long time to complete.

However, teachers reported that children genuinely enjoyed role play. They also acknowledged the positive impact of the little books on language development and vocabulary.

- Overall, most teachers perceived the activities to have worked well and reported a growing positive perception of their effectiveness.

At three different points during the training, teachers were asked to rate how well the different activities worked in their classrooms. Their responses are presented in the table below:

Time	Percentage of teachers rating activity success as 5, 6, or 7 on a 7-point scale (1 = Very Challenging, 7 = Worked Very Well)
1	49%
2	66%
3	83%

- Teachers were impressed with the programme's resources and activities, finding them fun, interesting, and easy to implement. They also saw the value of making their own inexpensive resources.
- Teachers highlighted the programme's support for children's learning and language development.

“  
Role play helps  
the children  
with language  
and words.”

“  
[It was interesting ...]  
the way the  
children are able to  
tell the story with the  
help of the little books.  
It showed they were  
listening, even though it  
sometimes doesn't  
feel like it.”



## Findings continued...

Many of the teachers' responses regarding change in their classroom practice related to storytelling and the way they used stories in the classroom:

- Teachers now planned to use a single story across different activities over an extended period.
- Teachers planned to enhance children's experiences of stories by using resources such as pictures and puppets.
- Teachers intended to actively involve children in storytelling and make learning interesting for them by asking questions before sharing the story; providing opportunities for children to tell their own stories and role play the characters; and asking children questions about the story to engage them.

“

To tell one story in two weeks and every day after two weeks is very interesting, exciting and with huge pleasure I will apply it.

I thought to myself: 'Jinne, we can tell stories! We have been telling stories all along!' And I didn't know that a story could be told so extensively, because other times when we told stories, you showed the book to the children and then you told the story, but we never drew a picture along with the story, we never laid it all out, we never sang the song along with the story ...

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## Significance and implications

These research findings show that the Little Stars training and classroom programme are perceived as highly valuable and feasible for teachers in under-resourced contexts. The programme has great potential to strengthen teaching practices, particularly in the areas of storytelling, role play and creating engaging learning experiences.

Teachers demonstrated high motivation and self-reported implementation of programme activities. They expressed their intentions to be more prepared for teaching activities and to incorporate the programme's strategies and resources into their future teaching. Their feedback also demonstrated a shift in their approach to language and early literacy instruction as well as their understanding of how children learn.

The programme positively influenced teachers' perceptions of language and early literacy teaching, and for many teachers, a renewed confidence and enthusiasm for teaching.

“

I thought that we can all tell stories, so what are we going to learn? Self-confidence, that is what I gained. And the children as well, they participate.

... the programme gave me self-confidence. The programme is structured very well. I know everything is there. The children are bubbly/animated/excited, can tell stories!

There are times when you feel despondent. Teaching is not an easy job. The programme makes it easier, I have more peace of mind, because you have the story. On Monday you can look at it and know that this is your story and activities for the week.

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