

Research Project – comparison of Talk Boost & Wellcomm Speech & Language Toolkits

Rationale:

The Developing Local Provision Project in the Eastwards Consortium of schools in north-east Birmingham was started in September 2021, and the first Phase was completed in July 2023. The intention was for all children to benefit from this project, and all schools wherever they are on their school improvement journey. In order for this to be successful a full time Project Leader role was created, alongside a practitioner role four days a week to support the Project Leader in delivering the project to all schools.

The focus of this project was speech and language development, and schools were audited initially in terms of their Wellcomm experience and rated beginner/intermediate/enhanced:

- Beginner – not currently using Wellcomm
- Intermediate – using Wellcomm but not consistently, or not with significant impact on pupil outcomes
- Enhanced – using Wellcomm consistently with significant impact on pupil outcomes

Each level of school would benefit from the project:

- Beginner – full training and ongoing support to implement Wellcomm in school
- Intermediate – ongoing support to embed Wellcomm and ensure consistency and impact
- Enhanced – the opportunity to support other schools; share best practice; be an integral part of research projects to create toolkits to enhance the use of Wellcomm throughout different areas within the school; identify other communication toolkits such as Talk Boost and the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) and create research projects around these; investigate ways we can share Wellcomm data for children making the transition from Early Years providers to primary schools.

We accept that this rating will be fluid and schools will move between the different levels as the project progresses. The research projects that Enhanced Schools will be part of will be integral to the sustainability of the project. The Project Leader, alongside the allocated facilitator, will support schools with the research-based projects; these adaptations will not be shared with the wider consortia until the impact of these adaptations can be measured. For schools that have made the decision not to use Wellcomm, and are using other toolkits, they will be incorporated into this project by the use of additional research projects. We will be able to investigate how NELI and Wellcomm will interact with each other, and how they can complement each other. For schools that are using Talk Boost, we will be able to share the impact and good practice and compare with Wellcomm.

This report focuses on the comparison between Talk Boost & Wellcomm.

Talk Boost	Wellcomm
Session specific length – 45 minutes long. A significant length of time for EYFS & KS1 children.	Sessions can be variable in length and can be adapted to the needs of the children.
Resources provided – high quality but not always enough copies for each child. Removes the need for lengthy preparation of resources by the Talk Boost practitioner.	Resources self-prepared – can be time consuming.
Practitioner has a script to follow, with lots of questions to support the learning of the children. Script not supposed to be deviated from so adult does not always have a chance to extend the children's talking/sentences.	Each activity has notes to support but no requirements to follow exactly. Lots of opportunities to develop discussion and encouragement to ask open questions e.g. Why? When? Where?
Strategies for support including offering a choice of answer and use of gestures.	Very similar strategies – choice and gestures used throughout the programme.
Many activities last for 10+ minutes, including for EYFS children. It has been observed that the children's concentration & interest does sometimes wane.	Short activities for EYFS, usually 5 minutes. Longer activities for Wellcomm Primary. However, any activity can always be adapted if a child's concentration wanes.
A written script is provided, which makes it easier for a TA to prepare.	No script provided. This means that the Teacher/TA has to consider and develop the questioning themselves. This is more time consuming and may be challenging for less experienced staff but means that questions can be adapted for the children that are taking part in the interventions.
Proper games with rules and a winner. Can cause issues as children become upset if they do not 'win'.	Simple activities without rules so there are no 'winners'.

Staff viewpoint:

- Talk Boost is good for 'Amber' children with some language skills and longer attention spans.
- Wellcomm is more beneficial for 'Red' children who achieve at a lower level. More flexible as children can work in small groups or 1:1.
- Wellcomm is useful for children with greater S & L needs e.g., need to develop labelling & role play skills and extending sentences.
- Children with severe SALT needs still need to work with a therapist as neither Talk Boost or Wellcomm will fully address their needs.
- Wellcomm flags up gaps for individual children and gives a good starting point.
- Wellcomm can be used in Continuous Provision, whole class, as well as for intervention.
- Once children have achieved amber/green on Wellcomm, could then move onto Talk Boost as extension.
- Talk Boost is good for narrative and storytelling skills as well a vocabulary. Many games also focus on turn taking.
- Talk Boost is very scripted, so staff know what to say. Some repetition of activities to reinforce concepts.
- Some children find Talk Boost activities difficult to follow. Some activities are too mature and not always age-appropriate.

- Wellcomm is very good as it focuses on specific ages, so Summer birthdays are screened a lower section than Autumn birthdays.
- Talk Boost provides all resources, so quicker to set up sessions.
- Wellcomm is better if children need shorter activities or 1:1 sessions.
- Talk Boost is not good for flexibility if children do not work well in a group.

Conclusion:

- Although very similar regarding the assessment process, the overall consensus appears to be that Talk Boost is more beneficial for those children who are working just below age-related standards for Speaking & Listening and have a longer concentration span.
- Talk Boost is more supportive for those with less experience, as it is fully scripted. Planning and preparation is less time consuming as all resources are provided and the order of the sessions is set out clearly in the Talk Boost Intervention manual.
- Wellcomm can be more beneficial for those children with greater special needs, as activities start at the age of 6 months' development.
- Wellcomm activities have greater flexibility. They can be carried out with small groups or 1:1. They can be carried out once or more per week or even daily, depending on the needs of the child. Sessions can range from 5-20 minutes and activities can be adapted during the session. As there is no script, the adult is free to differentiate the questions and encourage the child to extend their sentences and allow a greater proportion of child talk.

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