Wordworks
Changing lives through literacy

Internal evaluation of the Every Word Counts RCL Foods project in Worcester, Western Cape

November 2016

By Lynn Stefano, Beryl Hermanus & Linda Biersteker

Sharing our learning

We thank the following people for making this project possible:

- Magrieta Lesch and Camelita Christians of FCW for facilitating the Every Word Counts workshops, and inspiring the participants to put what they learned into practice;
- The ECD practitioners, ECD assistants and home visitors from the Worcester area, who kindly shared their experience in the focus groups;
- Anina Visagie, Breede Valley area ECD Coordinator, Department of Social Development, Worcester who assisted with the many logistical arrangements;
- Pam Picken for her energetic contribution to the project and unwavering commitment to improving the lives of young children.
- RCL Foods Limited for funding the project and the evaluation, and Warren Farrer, Group CSI Executive, for his support.

Acronyms:

DoSD Department of Social Development
ECD Early Childhood Development
EWC Every Word Counts
FCW Foundation for Community Work

Contact details:

Phone: 021 7889233
Fax: 086 775 7930
Email: info@wordworks.org.za
Website: www.wordworks.org.za
Address: 2 Jacobs Ladder, St James, 7945

Contents

Summary 1
1. Background 2
1.1 Every Word Counts (EWC) 2
1.2 The Worcester project 2
1.3 The selection of ECD practitioners, ECD assistants and home visitors 4
1.4 EWC delivery and support model inputs 4
2. Evaluation focus and methods 5
2.1 Focus of the evaluation 5
2.2 Evaluation questions 5
2.3 Evaluation design and processes 5
2.4 Limitations 5
3. The evaluation findings 6
3.1 Has delivery of EWC changed participants understanding, practical skills and implementation? 6
3.2 Integration of EWC into existing work 6
3.3 Changes in participants' understanding of language development and early literacy 7
3.4 Use of new understandings and skills 8
3.5 Using EWC with their own families and friends 10
3.6 EWC content referred to in the focus groups 11
3.7 What has been learned about EWC training delivery and the implementation support model ? 12
FCW trainers 12
ECD assistants 13
Introducing EWC to the whole centre: ECD practitioners and the role of principals 14
4. Summary, reflection and recommendations 15
4.1 Uptake and participation 15
4.2 The training programme 15
4.3 Increased understanding and use of skills learned during EWC training 15
4.4 Support for implementation 15
4.5 Proposals for 2017 monitoring and evaluation 16
Conclusion 17

Summary

This report documents an evaluation of the Every Word Counts programme (EWC) in Worcester, Western Cape, a partnership between Wordworks and the Foundation for Community Work (FCW) funded by RCL Foods. The evaluation aimed firstly to assess whether the model of delivery had effectively deepened participants' understanding of early learning and language development, taught participants practical skills and activities and enabled participants to apply what they had learned; and secondly, how well the delivery and support model was working.

Wordworks trained and mentored FCW trainers to offer monthly 3 hour workshops to ECD practitioners, Family in Focus home visitors and ECD assistants attached to the Department of Social Development who were responsible for monitoring implementation of the activities and approach by the ECD practitioners. Support materials were provided for trainers and participants. Nine workshops were offered between March and November 2016 with 24 ECD practitioners from 24 centres, 6 home visitors and 4 ECD assistants completing the programme.

Information sources for the evaluation included focus groups for ECD practitioners; ECD assistants, and the FCW home visitors and their coordinator; interviews with the FCW trainers and the Department of Social Development ECD Coordinator for the Winelands region, feedback from the Wordworks EWC team and analysis of programme records including registers and pre- and post-workshop knowledge questionnaires. This small internal evaluation reflects anecdotal and self-report evidence of interactions and activities. There was no external assessment of implementation by participants or child or family outcomes.

In relation to the effectiveness in changing understanding of early language and literacy and practices to support this, interview and focus group information indicate positive changes. ECD practitioners and home visitors gave many practical examples from their own experience of application of EWC content and activities in both their personal and working lives. Participants showed that they were able to integrate new information and build upon their prior ECD experience.

The data suggests that there should be more emphasis in future training on fantasy play, songs, rhymes and storytelling and maths activities.

The evaluation clearly indicated that support in the field is important to ensure that EWC is properly implemented and that the system of depending on ECD assistants was ineffective. It proved to be unrealistic to expect that a single practitioner from each ECD centre would cascade the model to colleagues thus extending the reach of the programme.

Key recommendations from the evaluation included:

- Participants should receive a Homework booklet with tasks and reflections to guide their implementation and feedback at each subsequent workshop.
- Principals need to be involved to support EWC take up in ECD centres so that there is regular feedback from participants and assistance with planning and resources.
- Additional practitioners should be enrolled from ECD centres which are implementing EWC to strengthen programme support and implementation in those centres.
- ECD assistants should no longer be responsible for monitoring implementation and FCW trainers should provide stronger field support and monitoring of the programme.
- Ongoing implementation monitoring in 2017 to fully embed the programme should include:
    - observations of home visitors' and practitioners' activities and practices with feedback to enable tracking of improvement from baseline to endline;
    - a focus on the support role of principals.

Background

I.1 Every Word Counts

Every Word Counts (EWC) is a ten-session programme of training and resources that can be used across a range of community settings to introduce new knowledge about early learning to those who care for and work with babies and young children. The programme involves a particular approach to language, early literacy and maths concepts and provides practical ideas to guide interactions with children from birth to 5 years of age.

Wordworks trains trainers and equips organisations to integrate the EWC approach, activities and resources into their work (i) with parents and caregivers through home visits or parenting group sessions, and (ii) with ECD practitioners and playgroup facilitators who can use what they learn in their daily interactions with children in ECD centres and playgroups.

How partner organisations take up EWC differs according to context. For example children served by a partner organisation may be younger (birth-2 years) or older (3-5 years) and only some of the resource books will apply. Also, depending on the primary focus of the service offered by the partner and the degree of support for implementation there may be more focus on added EWC activities and less on the approach to early language that guides interaction with babies and young children, which for most practitioners require substantial behaviour change.

I.2 The Worcester project

Wordworks and the Foundation for Community Work (FCW), partnered in 2016 to train 30 ECD practitioners, 9 ECD assistants attached to the Department of Social Development (DoSD) and 11 FCW home visitors from Worcester, Western Cape in the EWC programme. The project, which was funded by RCL Foods, aimed to:

- Deepen FCW trainers ('trainers') and FCW home visitors, ECD practitioners/ECD assistants ('participants') understanding of how to build babies' and young children's language and support early literacy development;
- Enable FCW home visitors to use EWC materials with families during home visits;
- Enable ECD practitioners to apply their new understanding and skills in their work with babies and children in ECD centres; and
- Enable ECD assistants to monitor implementation of EWC in ECD centres.

There were nine workshops from March to November 2016 and attendance at 7 of these was a requirement for 'graduation'. Attendance at the workshops fluctuated with an average of 42 per workshop as seen in Figure 1. 24 ECD practitioners from 24 ECD centres with a total enrolment of 1667 children as well as six home visitors and four DoSD ECD assistants met the attendance requirement and received certificates.

Figure I: Workshop participation

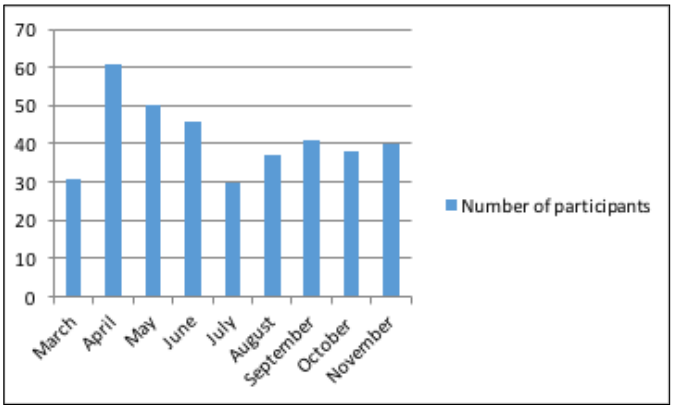


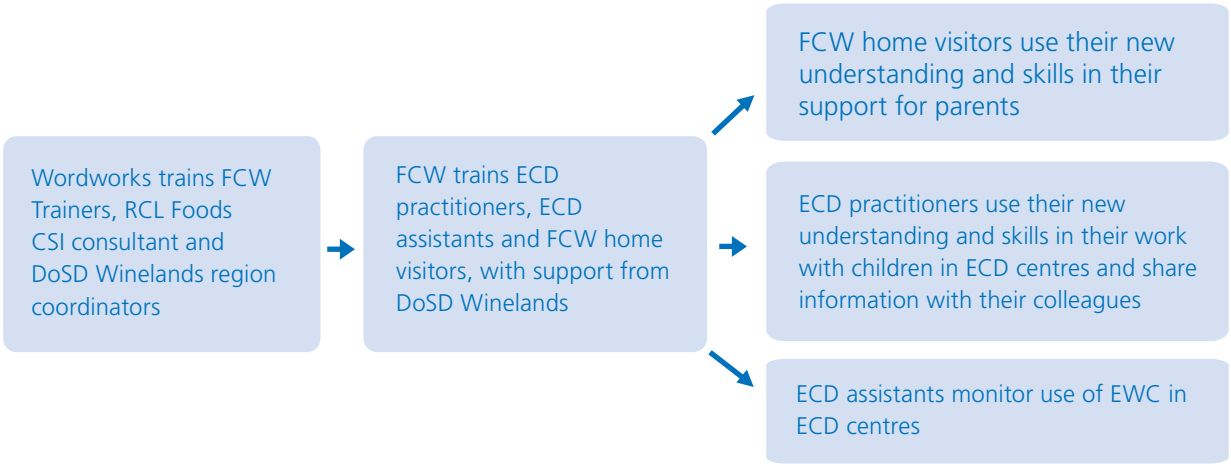
Table I: Participants who completed the EWC programme

Category of Participant	Target for completion	Completed
ECD Practitioner	30	24
Home Visitor	11	6
ECD Assistant	9	4
Total	50	34

As Table 1 shows 68% of the project target number of participants attended most of the workshops and received a certificate of attendance.

Figure 2 shows the training and implementation model for this project.

Figure 2: EWC RCL Foods project training and implementation model



1.3 The selection of ECD practitioners, ECD assistants and home visitors

ECD practitioners were selected for the workshops by DoSD with preference for those from funded or registered sites. FCM trainers indicated that they "really didn't have a say this year on the selection process and I think maybe we prefer it that way since we have a lot of other responsibilities." All the ECD practitioners have babies in their ECD centres, some start at three months, others at six months.

ECD assistants were selected for placements with DoSD from a general database of youth in the area, with those with some ECD background preferred. When they were appointed DoSD organised some basic training which focused on registration and the ECD learning programme. The DoSD service delivery area staff provided some guidance and support. ECD assistants indicated that with few exceptions they lacked ECD background.

> *I was studying social auxiliary work and will go on to do my degree.*
>
> *(I did an) office admin practical at DoSD, so I left my CV there.*
>
> *After matric I didn't know what to do, I gave in my CV everywhere, and then they called me for an interview.*
>
> *I was working at PEP Stores. Then someone told me DoSD was looking for unemployed people.*

FCW home visitors support 35 families each, and visit them every week for between 30 minutes and 1 hour. During visits a standardised programme of activities guides their implementation.

1.4 EWC delivery and support model inputs

- 3-day training of two FCW trainers, one RCL Foods Corporate Social Investment (CSI) consultant, and four DoSD Winelands regional coordinators (conducted by Wordworks).
- Monthly 1-hour mentoring sessions for two FCW trainers (conducted by Wordworks) to prepare them to deliver the monthly training sessions.
- Monthly 3-hour training sessions for up to 50 participants (conducted by FCW).
- Materials and resources provided to trainers (by Wordworks):
    - EWC Trainer's file (including Guide for trainers, A5 colour and black and white books, workbook, additional reading, handouts, games and animal cards, alphabet charts, M&E templates, and Guidelines for portfolios and certificates, and flash drive).
- Materials and resources provided to participants (by Wordworks):
    - EWC A5 colour books for home visitors and A5 black and white books for ECD practitioners and assistants, workbook, story books, handouts, games, animal cards and alphabet charts.

The delivery and support model is underpinned by the assumptions that ECD practitioners and home visitors would have the space in their programmes to integrate EWC ideas and activities and that FCW trainers and DoSD, through the ECD assistants, would support them to do this. As only one ECD practitioner was selected to attend from each centre a further assumption was that s/he would share the information with colleagues who could then also use the EWC material/ideas, so extending the reach of the programme.

Evaluation focus and methods

2.1 Focus of the evaluation

1) To assess whether the model of delivery has been effective in:

- deepening participants' **understanding** of early learning and language development;
- teaching participants **practical skills and activities**; and
- enabling participants to **apply what they have learned** in their work and with their own families and friends.

2) To assess how the EWC delivery and support model is working and what improvements could be made.

2.2 Evaluation questions

The main questions the evaluation aimed to answer are:

- Has the participants' understanding of language development and early literacy and related skills increased, and in what ways?
- If so, have the participants begun to use their new understanding and skills in their work and with their own families?
- What lessons have been learned and what recommendations can be made to improve future training and implementation to support uptake of the content by participants, and monitoring and support offered in the field to participants.

2.3 Evaluation design and processes

- Three focus groups comprising (i) ECD practitioners (ii) ECD assistants, and (iii) FCW home visitors and their coordinator.
- Semi-structured interviews with FCW trainers, Department of Social Development ECD coordinator (Winelands region).
- Pre- and post-workshop questionnaires for EWC Books 1 – 3.
- Feedback from Wordworks EWC team.

Focus groups of 1 ½ hours each were held on 1 November in Worcester with the following self-selected participants:

- Eleven ECD practitioners from the main areas/communities in Worcester (e. g. Zwelethemba, Avian Park, Riverview, Roodewal, Esselen Park, Hex Park) volunteered at the October training session;
- Five ECD assistants were available on the day of the focus group;
- Six FCW home visitors and their coordinator volunteered at the October training session.
- The proceedings, which were conducted mainly in Afrikaans, and in English, were transcribed and translated into English for the report.

2.4 Limitations

Given that this was a small pilot project the internal evaluation does not attempt to assess implementation by participants, nor does it attempt to determine outcomes for families, babies and young children. The report does however reflect anecdotal evidence of interactions and activities with caregivers, babies and young children.

The evaluation findings

3.1 Has delivery of EWC changed participants understanding, practical skills and implementation?

Implementation of EWC by participants depends upon their understanding of the EWC material presented, gaining practical skills and having the resources and motivation to apply what was learned. The degree of fit between add-on programme approaches and activities and existing ECD programmes offered by home visitors and ECD practitioners has previously been found to be a significant factor in whether it is taken up or not. This was indicated when EWC was piloted as part of a community health worker programme and has also been seen with other local interventions.

3.2 Integration of EWC into existing work

Participants reported that the EWC material had a good fit with their existing knowledge and experience and that they could build on this. For example a home visitor reported "Working with pregnant mothers we knew about what to eat, what to drink, what are the dangers - now we bring in talking to your baby".

FCW trainers confirmed that because there is a literacy component in the Family in Focus home visiting programme it is very easy to integrate EWC activities and the approach as it does not require something extra, but an extension of what they are already doing. Similarly, the DoSD ECD Coordinator felt that the fit with the national curriculum framework for supporting reading and writing and numbers is an advantage. The external interviewer also noted that practitioners could see the connections with their existing programmes.

ECD practitioners spoke about how they include EWC activities when planning as shown in the following examples:

> *When we plan for a theme for the week, we fit EWC with that theme. e.g. wild animals. The teacher used to make a poster of wild animals, they have to look for the animals. Now we make a book of wild animals. We fold it, put the pictures into the book. Their name is on it. The children cut the pictures in one week, and the next week they use those pictures to paste into the book.*

> *We plan the activities according to the themes and include EWC. For example: three plastic bottles – the small, middle and large, from small to big. And with boxes, from small to big, and few and many. Children get excited. They enjoy the activity that we learned in the course.*

However some of the ECD practitioners raised a concern about conflicting information given by other training providers in their ECD training:

> *We learned that it doesn't matter if a child can't read or write properly. But at the other training they say the child must be able to write their name. We wish the different trainings could be coordinated more, with the same messages.*

The external evaluator also picked up on this, noting that "There is some tension between the very traditional learning methods and the processes and methods used in EWC" and suggested that training more practitioners from schools where practitioners had already been trained might be one way of tackling this in future RCL Foods-funded training.

3.3 Changes in participants' understanding of language development and early literacy

The three groups of participants (ECD practitioners, ECD assistants, FCW home visitors) all reported grasping the key EWC messages relating to language development and early literacy. Their comments reflect their increased appreciation of the significant role caregivers can play in stimulating babies and young children's cognitive development, including understanding that learning happens through play and how to correct children's efforts in ways that encourage them to keep learning. The importance of bonding and relationship building were not new concepts to the participants. However, many of their comments reflect a deeper appreciation that loving, responsive relationships foster trust and learning. Another area of change that emerged was that participants spoke of feeling more confident and capable as a result of the training and that having this new understanding and skill has enhanced their sense of worth and strengthened the quality of their work.

Pre- and post-knowledge questionnaires were administered for Books 1 – 3 and a pre- questionnaire for Books 4 – 6. The results of the questionnaires helped trainers identify knowledge gaps which they could address during training. They also provided evidence of changes in understanding once training was completed. For example, the results of the post-workshop questionnaire relating to the belief that children's mistakes should always be corrected showed a 56.33% change in attitude. The majority of participants now understand that children should not always be corrected when making mistakes. These results were borne out during focus groups discussions, when participants explained that they had learned gentle ways of correcting children's mistakes that were very effective (See comments in Box 1.).

Box I: What participants reported learning during the training

We were very excited to learn about children's brain development. (ECD Practitioner)

We need to correct children easily. Don't say 'hayi, hayi'. Just correct easily, give the explanation about what is happening. (ECD Practitioner)

You can teach children reading through recognising signs and directions, like stop signs. (ECD Practitioner)

Baby talk – we must use the correct word, and we must expand on what the baby is trying to say. For example when they say 'water', we can say 'we drink water from a glass'. (Home visitor)

When a child says a word incorrectly we used to correct the child. But now I know that I don't need to correct the child, I can just use the correct word in a sentence. That is how the child learns. (Home visitor)

The parent or the teacher can help the child to talk when they start talking, and to count, they can learn from the games you play with them. (ECD assistant)

To build relationships. Have quality time with children, like play and read a book. (ECD assistant)

The toys that we learned to make – it is everyday things that you find in the house, it doesn't require money so it is good. (ECD assistant)

Children must be free to draw, not follow the dots to make letters. (ECD assistant)

We got new ideas that gave us confidence to try new things with stakeholders and children. (Home visitor)

3.4 Use of new understanding and skills

Focus group participants were able to give a number of practical examples of how they had applied their new understanding and skills in their interactions with children and with caregiver/child groups.

Box 2: How participants are using new understanding and skills

The enjoyment of walking through a book - 'prente wandeling'. Different ages, even the very young children, want to see what is happening in the books. (ECD practitioner)

I spoke to the children about our outing (to the park), and asked them what they did. They told me 'swing' and 'slide' (using the English words) and I gave them the words in Afrikaans for these activities. (ECD practitioner)

Linking to real life – they see something in a book, and then talk about what is happening at home. One child saw a ball in the book and said: 'I have a ball at home too'. (ECD practitioner)

The activity I enjoyed the most was the letter boxes. I use these at school now. (ECD practitioner)

The two year olds made a cardboard (book) with me. But they are small. I cut everything, then I put the glue on and they paste the picture on the cardboard. (ECD practitioner)

We give the parents homework – they enjoy it. Especially making blank books and writing their own stories and children of 5 and 6 years enjoy it. (Home visitor)

Don't throw away the oats box or tea boxes, and milk carton. Then when I am a teacher I say I have nothing, but now I ask the principal to bring it for me, and now the children build the house with it. (ECD Practitioner)

Recycled materials like bottles, newspapers, cardboard for reading, making games and playing. (ECD Practitioner)

I encouraged them (parents) to join the library, to make their own books, to draw. I explained that that is how your child's brain develops. Spend time with your child, add different words, let them write what they see. (Home visitor)

One day I got a child to position himself in and around the car and gave him the words: on top, in front, behind, next to, and so on. The other children heard this and saw it. It made it easier to understand and the children enjoyed it very much. (Home visitor)

I encourage parents to spend more time with the children, to take them out when they go shopping, and use these opportunities to talk, like reading the signs around them. (Home visitor)

Sometimes the parents don't have the money to buy toys. But in this programme when you teach them, they know how to get toys for their children – there are more toys in the house. It teaches them counting, you can use everything that is in the house. Parents didn't think about that before. It's something new. (Home visitor)

I didn't know that when they see a word starting with an F, like my name Francine, that they say 'there is your name'. Now I know that they are recognizing the first letter and I don't say they are wrong. (Home visitor)

A gap stressed by the external focus group interviewer was the paucity of references by ECD practitioners to language development in the first 1000 days. This may partly be due to the fact that many of the practitioners who attended were selected from classes with older children. However, there were some examples which demonstrate an increased awareness of stimulating very early language and communication.

We have babies from 6 months, in the beginning we kept them dry, fed them and gave them their bottle in their cot. Then I learned here at EWC that baby learning is very important, that the baby learns before birth. Now the way we teach them is completely different. We take them out of the cot. When I ask an older child to count the children, the one-year-old follows behind the older one. She can't say their names, but she knows their names. I ask the children to bend forward so that the little one can touch their heads as they count, and I praise her for doing this.

I have a little one who is 7 months old. She was sitting in a pram with the class who often sing Twinkle twinkle little star. I thought she was making similar sounds but I wasn't sure. Then her mother asked whether the children were singing Twinkle twinkle little star, because she thought she was picking up the tune. We think they are not learning, but they are listening, they just can't say the words.

The very young ones can't pronounce the words, but they know what the book is showing.

However, it is a big step for those caring for babies and toddlers to put these new ideas into practice. In spite of training, some practitioner still focus on babies' physical needs and do not report changes in the way they interact with and talk with them.

I work with babies when the carer doesn't come. I feed them, prepare their bottles, measure their milk, change nappies, nap time, and they play with their toys in the cot. Sometimes when the baby is awake I put him into a box in the same space as the older children. Then they look around at the older children.

I showed the lady who is looking after small children how to take the book and look at it with the children. Then she didn't do it. This year, I brought her to the training, then when we went back, she said to me that things I was telling her last year she now realises she must do these things.

3.5 Using EWC with their own families and friends

EWC training is strengthened when participants implement the activities in their own lives. This has also been found to motivate practitioners to promote the ideas and activities in their work situations. Participants were therefore asked about whether or how they had used the EWC activities and approach with their own families and friends and many gave examples of doing this.

Box 3: Use of EWC with family and friends

My sister has a one year old. She talks in her own language. She is communicating. I tell my sister: 'talk to her, give her the right word'. She gestures when she tries to tell us something, it is too lovely. When I visit I can see my sister does what I have told her. I also role model for my sister. (Home visitor)

There is a young woman who visits with her five year old. I sat with the child and made little books and read to her. She enjoyed it so much. She asked if she could have them. It just showed how interested the children are in books. (ECD Practitioner)

I explained to my 2 ½ year old 'what is the same' and 'what is different'. We heard a police van and he said 'there is an ambulance'. I said 'it looks like an ambulance, because it has stripes like an ambulance, but it is a police van. I explained what was different and what was the same. Then I showed him an ambulance – it also had stripes. Then another vehicle passed that also had stripes, and I said it wasn't a police van or an ambulance, but something else – a bakkie! Now I know how to correct him. I like this. (Home visitor)

We do share with people at home. They can see the importance of communicating with your young child. The children enjoy it when their parents talk with them. I warn them about spending too much time in front of the television, and the importance of spending time with their child talking, listening and sharing, especially at meal times. (Home visitor)

I have a 3 year old. Now I can do these things with her. I read her the book that we got at the training. I tell her stories, and then she wants to retell it to me, but it is a bit mixed up, she tells her own story. She enjoyed that, and wants to keep doing it – it helped us build our relationship and to spend quality time. (ECD assistant)

For about two weeks, every new person I met I told them about how important it is to talk to and read to children. They thought I was so clever! (ECD assistant)

I am pregnant with twins - I play music to them now, I didn't know that I should talk to them. I have learned that if I am sad, they are also sad, if I am happy, then they are happy! (ECD assistant)

I showed my 10 year old how to fold a book, and he makes his own books now. He writes English stories. (ECD Practitioner)

3.6 EWC content referred to in the focus groups

A summary analysis was undertaken of the themes and activities covered in the EWC books which were reflected in the participants' comments about the activities they have engaged in at work and with their own families (see Table 5)[1].

Table 5: EWC content mentioned in focus groups

Book and card number	Topic
Orientation session	Starting from birth and brain development
Book 1, card 1	Love your baby
Book 1, cards 2 and 3	Talk with your baby (babbling sounds and gestures)
Book 1, cards 4 – 6	Give words, Babies understand more than they can say
Book 1, card 7	Play
Book 1, card 13	Add to what your baby tries to say
Book 2, card 1	Enjoy good talking time
Book 2, cards 3 and 4	Give new words - the five senses
Book 2, cards 5 and 6	Ask and answer questions
Book 2, card 8	Make links
Book 2, cards 14-17	Talk about print
Book 2, card 18	Share a love of books
Book 3, card 1 and 2	Play with water and sand
Book 3, card 3	Play with blocks
Book 3, card 7	Play counting and measuring games
Book 3, card 10	Play games with letters (initial letter sounds)
Book 4, card 1	Let babies get to know books, Share a love of books
Book 4, cards 2 and 8	Join the library
Book 4, card 7	Make a cardboard book
Book 4, card 10	Talk about new words
Book 4, card 11	Link books to real life
Book 4, card 12	Make little books
Book 4, cards 13 and 14	Encourage pretend reading
Book 4, card 16	Point out letters
Book 5, cards 1 and 2	Create time, space and materials for drawing
Book 5, card 10	Write for a purpose
Book 5, card 12	Encourage your child to keep trying
Book 6, card 2	Count
Book 6, card 7	Compare and sort things
Book 6, card 9	Use position words

[1] This is not a frequency analysis as when someone raised a point, others in the focus group tended to add something different.

Themes in the training that were also referred to include: Encourage a strong foundation in mother tongue in the early years; adults and older siblings have a role to play in helping young children to learn; and use everyday items for play and learning.

While it was clear that participants were implementing many aspects of the EWC approach and activities and finding their own applications of the themes, some gaps are evident. Firstly there was very little mentioned about songs, action rhymes and stories or listening games. Another gap was the role of play, and in particular fantasy play, in the development of language and communication. In regard to maths there is no mention of measuring words, patterns or shapes and for writing and drawing story-drawing is not reflected. This suggests that while the broader approach has been grasped there is likely to be a need to build a more nuanced understanding and application. This would be evident in changes in activities done with children, ways of scaffolding learning and language used with children. Another area that may well require attention is more discussion of multilingualism and the importance of affirming home languages of all children.

3.7 What has been learned about the EWC training delivery and the implementation support model?

FCW trainers, home visitors, ECD assistants, ECD practitioners, the DoSD ECD Coordinator and external evaluator all shared their impressions of how effective the model had been. As noted above this involved Wordworks staff training the FCW trainers to deliver the workshops to home visitors, ECD practitioners and the assistants. ECD assistants were to oversee and support delivery in ECD centres and FCW staff supported the home visitors. It was also assumed that ECD practitioners would share the information with their principals and colleagues.

FCW trainers

The two FCW trainers attended an initial 3-day training of trainers in the EWC programme and then received monthly mentoring sessions in which EWC staff prepared them to present the monthly workshops which make up the training programme. They were also expected to support the ECD assistants in monitoring implementation. Both trainers are experienced ECD trainers but commented on what they had gained from participation in the programme, in particular in relation to facilitation as the content was not entirely new. One of the trainers had participated in piloting of the content and training with home visitors in the development stages of EWC.

> *For me it is entirely new to the work that I'm currently doing, in terms of facilitating. So the training that we received was an eye-opener for me … it was opening up more ventures, ideas in terms of how you can take early childhood development to the next level. So it is more creative, it is more colourful, it is more out there, more practical.*

Another area of importance for the trainers was their learning about reflection, in particular at a personal level.

> *The thing that I liked about Wordworks is that in all the reflections and all the interviews - it's always been specific areas with participants - like what have you done with your family. So it is not only about your professional life … and it's interesting.*

In terms of their support and monitoring role they commented that they do monthly FCW visits in their areas to see if EWC is being implemented, and sometimes work directly with parents and home visitors to see if home visitors understand the Family in Focus programme and are using the EWC books. After observing they give feedback to the coordinator and home visitors.

For the ECD centres their role was to support the ECD assistants to support the centres, however it is DoSD's role to monitor the ECD assistants. The ECD assistants' role is discussed in the following section.

The external evaluator considered that FCW trainers could play a far more active role in on-the-ground implementation support to home visitors and ECD practitioners but would have more time if they did not have to travel from Cape Town to Worcester and back on

ECD assistants

ECD assistants are primarily responsible for monitoring general compliance and ECD programme implementation by ECD site / centres for DoSD. They undertake unannounced monitoring visits in pairs and complete a checklist which is submitted to the DoSD ECD Coordinator. As part of these visits they were asked to assist with and monitor implementation of EWC. While they were able to give some examples of how they used what they learned in the training (e.g. the making of Nal'ibali books, asking what new words children have learnt, observing active play and whether practitioners are telling stories, talking to children, playing games with the children etc.), overall feedback is that they were not effective in this support role.

ECD assistants reported that their role had not been clearly explained to the ECD practitioners in the training and that they themselves were not clear what was expected of them. One challenge identified was that they are not well accepted by the ECD practitioners most of whom are older (and more experienced) than they are. Other challenges identified by the DoSD ECD Coordinator were that they depend on social workers for transport and were seldom in ECD centres sufficiently early to observe most of the programme. In addition none of them speak isiXhosa so they could not understand the practitioner-child interactions in isiXhosa-speaking ECD centres and relied on practitioners to translate for them. A further challenge was that the DoSD ECD Coordinator, who was responsible for supporting the ECD assistants, was not able to attend the monthly training sessions due to her many other responsibilities.

There is also a question about how motivated and interested ECD assistants were as it emerged in the focus group that none of them had any interest in pursuing a career in ECD once their time with DoSD comes to an end.

Practitioners for their part reported that ECD assistants had either not visited them, or visited once, twice or three times this year, and that they were not always visited by the same assistants. Some comments show that practitioners appreciated these visits, especially when the assistants actively engaged with them and gave constructive input. This was primarily in ECD centres where the practitioners, children and ECD assistants all spoke Afrikaans, which made the interactions easier compared to Afrikaans speaking assistants working in isiXhosa schools.

> *They bring information from Department of Social Development. They come to see that we implement what we learned, they want to see the activities being done with the children.*
>
> *They came to the crèche. They want to see what I did with the children. They say: 'you have done more'.*
>
> *They visited us three times. Some of them did lessons – about signs and reading. Different practitioners visit.*

However, comments from others show that the assistants are often not focused on the task at hand and do not interact in meaningful ways during their visits.

> *They came three times this year. The second time was with Pam (the RCL Consultant). She was a good lady, she talked with us and told us what to do. But others, they are sitting on a chair. They are not listening. Then after 5 minutes they are going.*

Some assistants play with their phones, others write.

They don't explain what is on their form, and what they are doing.

When asked what would help, the practitioners answered that they would like:

- the assistants to visit more often;
- to make an appointment because if they are alone at the preschool the practitioner cannot help them;
- to communicate more;
- the same assistants to return in order to build a relationship with them.

The FCW trainers indicated that while 'you can see that there really is a relationship between the principal and ECD assistants … you couldn't really see what is it that they do when they go to the different schools'. They also indicated that a three-hour monthly workshop and then doing a little monitoring was insufficient for ECD assistants who have minimal understanding of ECD and child development and also have so many other things to deal with. This view was supported by the external evaluator.

Introducing EWC to the whole centre: ECD practitioners and the role of principals

One of the ideas behind the training was that the ECD practitioners would share the information with their colleagues. The DoSD ECD Coordinator indicated that the principal was responsible to ensure that the practitioner came back and reported to them and the principal should then *"ensure that the programme is implemented in the whole school."*

Expecting EWC to be taken up in the whole centre appears to have been problematic, which is not surprising as cascading is generally difficult. The DoSD ECD Coordinator found that she had to continually remind principals in the forum meetings of their role and that *"one or two individual schools indicated that it wasn't working and there was a problem because some teachers didn't want to share".*

The FCW trainers doubted that much sharing had happened as principals reported that there had been no sharing. It also appears that although principals knew about the programme many of them had not been proactive in asking the practitioners to feedback. This was not always the case as one practitioner explained: *"I share with my principal and colleagues and we plan together. I tell her that she must teach this. I also share with the teacher of the babies. She says she will do it, but she doesn't do it. "*

Both FCW trainers and the external evaluator commented on the need to bring principals and other staff members more fully into the process to allow for whole school take-up. One way of doing this would be firstly to give principals the same kind of training so they could support the practitioner. But it would also require supporting them in implementation of EWC across the centre. Another option would be to train more practitioners from the same ECD centers. This would have to be balanced with a demand from many centres that have not yet had practitioners in the training.

Summary, reflection and recommendations

4.1 Uptake and participation

Although not all participants attended all the workshops the overall attendance was high, indicating interest and good organisational support from the local DoSD office. 34 of the target of 50 participants completed the training. Selection of participants from ECD centres had focused on those that were registered and subsidised. It is proposed that:

- additional practitioners from centres where someone has already been trained are recruited to the 2017 group to provide for a strong implementation base in their centres;
- practitioners responsible for the baby groups are included in the selection;
- Wordworks liaises with other training providers and WCED curriculum advisors in the region and attempts to resolve any conflicting understandings regarding practices to promote early learning and literacy to which ECD practitioners and their principals are being exposed in training. This is also important if, as the DoSD ECD Coordinator has suggested, EWC is added to other programmes such as SmartStart.

4.2 The training programme

Three-hour workshops, rather than the initial plan of one-and-a-half hours worked well and were necessary given the large groups. The training and facilitation activities were appreciated and engaging. It is recommended that there is a need for more focus in training on:

- understanding of early brain development, and the need for cognitive stimulation even before birth;
- multilingualism as many children are in programmes where the language of learning and teaching might not be their home language and it is important that all children's home languages and cultures are supported and affirmed.

4.3 Increased understanding and use of skills learned during EWC training

There was ample evidence of increased understanding and implementation. Participants gave very good examples from their own experience, not repeating specific examples from the books which show that they are applying what they have learned in their own situations, and learning from their own experiences. The good fit between the **EWC** and existing ECD programmes being implemented was clear in most cases. Home visitors for example have learned how to make links between their existing programme and EWC ideas and activities. ECD practitioners have used **EWC** ideas and activities to build on their prior ECD experience. New information that reportedly made a great impact was the importance of adding more words, especially giving the correct word in the child's own language and building vocabulary non formally; interactive reading; children learning to read from environmental print in the home and on outings rather than waiting for children to start school, which has been a common misconception about when and how children learn to read and write. In future training:

- EWC themes that were not explicitly referred to by 2016 focus group participants (fantasy play; songs, rhymes and storytelling; maths activities) should be emphasised
- Pre- and post-training knowledge questionnaires should be collected for all six EWC books to clarify whether there has been a knowledge shift on widely held incorrect views.

4.4 Support for implementation

What has emerged is that support in the field is important to ensure that EWC is properly implemented and that the system of depending on ECD assistants was not effective for a variety

of reasons, including their level of interest and capacity, lack of ECD training and experience, limited supervision and a multitude of other responsibilities. The expectation that a single ECD practitioner from each ECD centre would be able to cascade the model to her/his colleagues was unrealistic particularly as many principals did not follow up and provide support. To strengthen the system the following suggestions were made and several have already been implemented for the 2017 year:

- Participants to receive a Homework booklet with tasks and reflections to guide their implementation and feedback at each subsequent workshop;
- Principals need to be involved to support EWC take up in ECD centres so that there is regular feedback from participants and assistance with planning and resources so that implementation is enabled. Principals be invited to 3 meetings in 2017 and exposed to the EWC material. In addition the new EWC Homework booklet has a section with suggestions for principals and a simple checklist for them to complete to monitor implementation in their centre after each workshop;
- Enrol additional practitioners from ECD centres which are implementing EWC to strengthen programme support and implementation in those ECD centres;
- FCW trainers to play a stronger support and monitoring role of EWC both in the ECD centres and home visiting programme. This means spending more time actively engaging with those implementing the programme. ECD assistants will no longer be responsible for this;
- While ECD assistants will no longer attend the training and monitor EWC, DoSD, as a major ECD stakeholder, has a key role to play and what form this will take needs to be clarified;
- A refresher session to be offered to the 2016 intake in mid-2017.

4.5 Proposals for 2017 monitoring and evaluation

This 2016 internal evaluation has identified a number of strengths and some gaps in reported programme take-up and implementation support. At this stage it is recommended that the focus continue to be on implementation monitoring and evaluation with the prospect, once implementation is fully established, of working towards an outcome evaluation in 2018. In addition to continuing to collect pre- and post-knowledge data with a focus on understanding of content and how it translates into activities and practices, and interviews with programme staff, trainers, field support workers and beneficiaries the following is suggested:

- Streamline attendance records so that there is a running record per participant over the full programme rather than discrete records for each workshop (new attendees can be added at the bottom of the list);
- Maintain a register of field visits to support implementation by home visitors and ECD practitioners;
- Design an observation checklists for use by monitoring staff to determine the extent to which EWC is being implemented and feedback given to home visitors/ practitioners. This data can be scored to track improvements from baseline to endline and should focus both on activities and practices which form the EWC approach;
- Monitor and evaluate the support role of principals through:
    - Interviewing a sample of principals with a focus on their understanding of content and how it translates to activities and practices;
    - Analysis of the principals' checklist in the homework book.
- Conduct visits to ECD centres and homes to observe and assess implementation by practitioners and home visitors and caregivers.

Conclusion

Interview and focus group information and the high average attendance at workshops all indicate changes in understanding and many practical examples of application of EWC content and activities by participants in both their personal and working lives. To further embed and deepen implementation of all aspects of the EWC programme will take time and support and the building of a community of practice within the participants. Proposed adjustments for the 2017 programme in response to learnings from the 2016 year are likely to provide an excellent platform for this.