

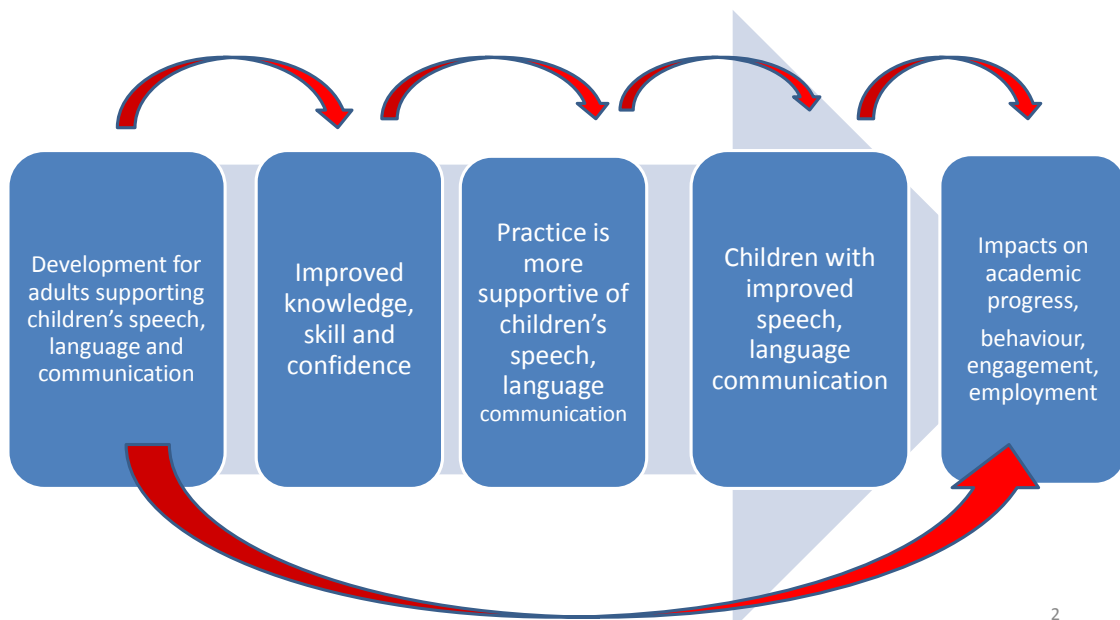
## I CAN evaluation approach

Evidence is at the core of all of I CAN's work. In everything we do, we aim to have maximum impact for children, young people and their families - with systems in place to measure that impact.

In this way, we know that what we do makes a difference. We can be sure that we reach as many children and young people as possible with *effective* programmes.

All I CAN's programmes or projects have an evaluation framework based on a theory of change model. This means we gather data about the impact on staff confidence, on practice in classrooms, on how schools change – but critically **on children's language and communication, their learning and behaviour**.

## Theory of change



Our evaluation designs vary depending on what we are evaluating. To measure the *impact* of our programmes and interventions we use a quasi-experimental approach, wherever possible we use a design with a comparison group. However, we will never depend solely on this method. We value both qualitative and quantitative evidence to make sure we are telling the whole story. Our evaluations are always grounded in real situations such as early years settings, schools or communities. We also have an implementation research approach where, as well as evaluating impact, we also look in depth at **how** programmes can be taken up by practitioners or parents.

I CAN's evaluation is characterised by:

- **Collaboration with academic partners.** I CAN staff have developed their skill and expertise in research methodology and data analysis, but by working closely with academic partners we continually build this.
- **A mixture of methods.** We use a range of methods, choosing those which are most relevant to the programme. For our time-limited programmes, we aim for as controlled a design as possible using a comparison group, with child assessments or checklists, so that can be sure that any changes are because of our programme – and not due to any other factors. However, for some of our wider, community programmes it is more appropriate to use a 'before and after' design, or a survey-based design where we might use focus groups or questionnaires.
- **Evidence that is meaningful.** We want to produce evidence that is useful, so that it helps teachers, funders, schools, nurseries, policy-makers making decisions. This means sometimes we may use 'softer' measures such as descriptive case studies, quotes or surveys which can tell a story. We also may use non-technical language to explain our results e.g. '8 months progress' rather than 'statistically significant progress'. We try and 'talk the language of schools' as this is where most of our programmes are based. This means we also might use data systems that already exist in schools or nurseries such as attainment data for pupils. Our rationale is: if it makes sense to them, they may well use our programme more readily.
- **Rigour.** Whatever we do, we try to make our evidence as robust as possible. We do this in a number of ways:
  - Where possible we use a control or comparison group so we can see the changes without our programmes as well as with them.
  - Where possible, we randomly assign schools, settings or children to an intervention or comparison group.
  - We might also look at the progress children made in a period *before* they started using an I CAN programme and compare it with *after*.
  - We collect data from a range of sources – e.g. teachers, children, school managers – to get a clearer, comprehensive picture. We collect hard data such as scores on a test, as well as interview data which tells a more comprehensive 'story'.
  - We carry out statistical analysis.
  - We ask someone external to analyse our data – or to check our own analysis. This is usually an academic partner, who will also advise us on our design.
  - We ask other people to gather our data – for example, we recruit speech and language therapy students to go into schools or nurseries and do assessments with children.

- Wherever possible, we ensure assessors or those carrying out analysis are 'blind' to whether children have taken part in an intervention.
- Whenever possible we used standardised assessment as measures.
- **Honesty.** When our evidence is less robust, we say so. We are transparent about the source of our evidence, as well as the methods and analysis we use. We will often say, for example, that our programme 'contributes' to improved progress rather than 'results in'.
- **Looking at *why* as well as *what*.** we carry out an evaluation of the process, as well as the outcome – this helps to improve the programme materials, timings, training etc. doing this we can identify barriers as well as what helps a programme. We take an 'implementation research' approach to our evaluations so we know how programmes work in real situations.
- **Communicating our findings.** Our evaluation reports don't sit on a shelf, we let people know about our findings through impact seminars, social media, our website, our own and others' newsletters. All of our evaluations have a communications plan to ensure findings are disseminated.

We submit our evidence to academic, peer-reviewed journals and have had a number of articles published. This is usually done in collaboration with an academic partner. We also submit our evidence to online databases, such as *What Works*, so that others can access it.

- **Involving children and young people.** In all of our evaluations we collect evidence from children and young people. We make sure our tools for doing this are 'child-friendly', for example using smiley faces to help them rate how they feel, or we carry out activities rather than conversations to gather their views.
- **On-going monitoring.** We want to know if children continue to make progress after the programme is out of pilot. Over the last 3 years we have developed systems which allow schools to send in data before and after one of our programmes – we analyse it and send it back to them. Recently, we've developed these systems into an online version. This allows nurseries and schools to get information about progress, and us to build a database to monitor the on-going impact.