

Learning Together: Evaluating a Family Learning Program in a changing world

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The program

- Learning Together is a program for families with children aged birth to four
- Is a universal program in targeted areas
- The overarching aim is to engage families in their children's learning in order to improve outcomes for the children



- Learning Together uses a strengths based approach to families (not an expert or deficit model)
- A participatory and collaborative style of engagement with families
- Activities include supported playgroups, cooking together, making books, formal and informal study groups



The history

- Learning Together had been operating since 2003
- From its inception there was a research project associated with the program
- This proved to be less than useful
- There was ongoing interest from similar programs as to the tools and methodologies that were being used



The opportunity

- We have evidence from a series of Annual Family Surveys that Learning Together was changing knowledge, confidence and behaviour of adults and confidence and behaviour of children
- The Smarter School *Communities Making a Difference* National Partnership enabled an expansion of Learning Together and an opportunity to trial a second model



- This was an opportunity to begin ‘from scratch’ a new evaluation of
 - the program,
 - outcomes for families and children, and
 - the effectiveness of a new outreach model
- And to lay the groundwork for a potential longitudinal study



The Challenges

- To stay true to the tenets of Learning Together
- To find appropriate tools
- To keep the process manageable and sustainable
- To be iterative and open to emergent opportunities



The Evaluation

- A project plan and logic model were developed
- Outcomes were devised and included measures relating to the adults, the children and the program
- An intricate evaluation plan was constructed



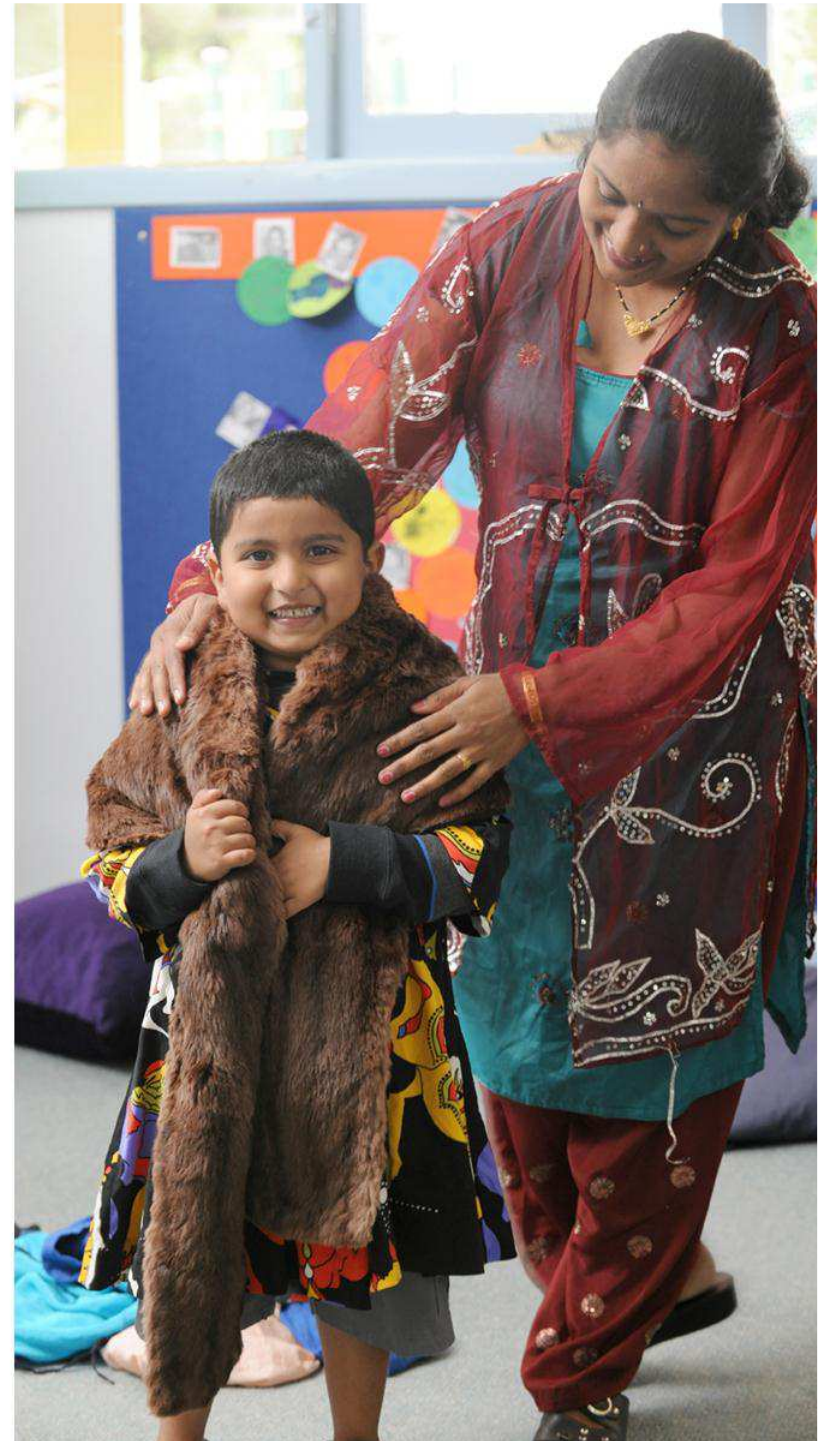
A framework

In order to ensure that we were evaluating effectively and deeply we utilised *Bennett's Hierarchy of Evidence*

Result or effect	7. Impact: social, economic, environmental conditions intended as end results, impact or benefits of programs; public and private benefits.
	6. Actions: Patterns of behaviour and procedures, such as decisions taken, recommendations adopted, practices implemented, actions taken, technologies used, policies enacted
	5. Learning: Knowledge (awareness, understanding, mental abilities); opinions (outlooks, perspectives, viewpoints); skills (verbal or physical abilities); aspirations (ambitions, hopes).
	4. Reactions: Degree of interest; feelings toward the program; positive and negative interest in topics addresses, acceptance of activity leaders and attraction to educational methods of program activities.
Implementation	3. Participation: Number of people reached; characteristics/diversity of people; frequency and intensity of contact/participation.
	2. Activities: Events, educational methods used; subject matter taught; media work, promotional activities.
	1. Resources: Staff and volunteer time; salaries; resources used; equipment, travel.

The tools

- Literacy Activities survey
- Parenting and Learning Survey
- Annual Family Survey
- Reflections by educators
- Case studies
- Focus groups of families, educators
- Interviews of families, educators
- Learning Together Stories
- Reflect Respect Relate



Impact

- Relationships scale
- Case studies
- Interviews with families

Actions

- Annual Family Survey
- Literacy Activities Survey
- Relationships scale

Learning

- Parenting & Learning Survey
- Reflections by educators & families
- Relationship scale

Reactions

- Learning Together Stories
- Focus Groups of families & principals

Participation

- Demographic data

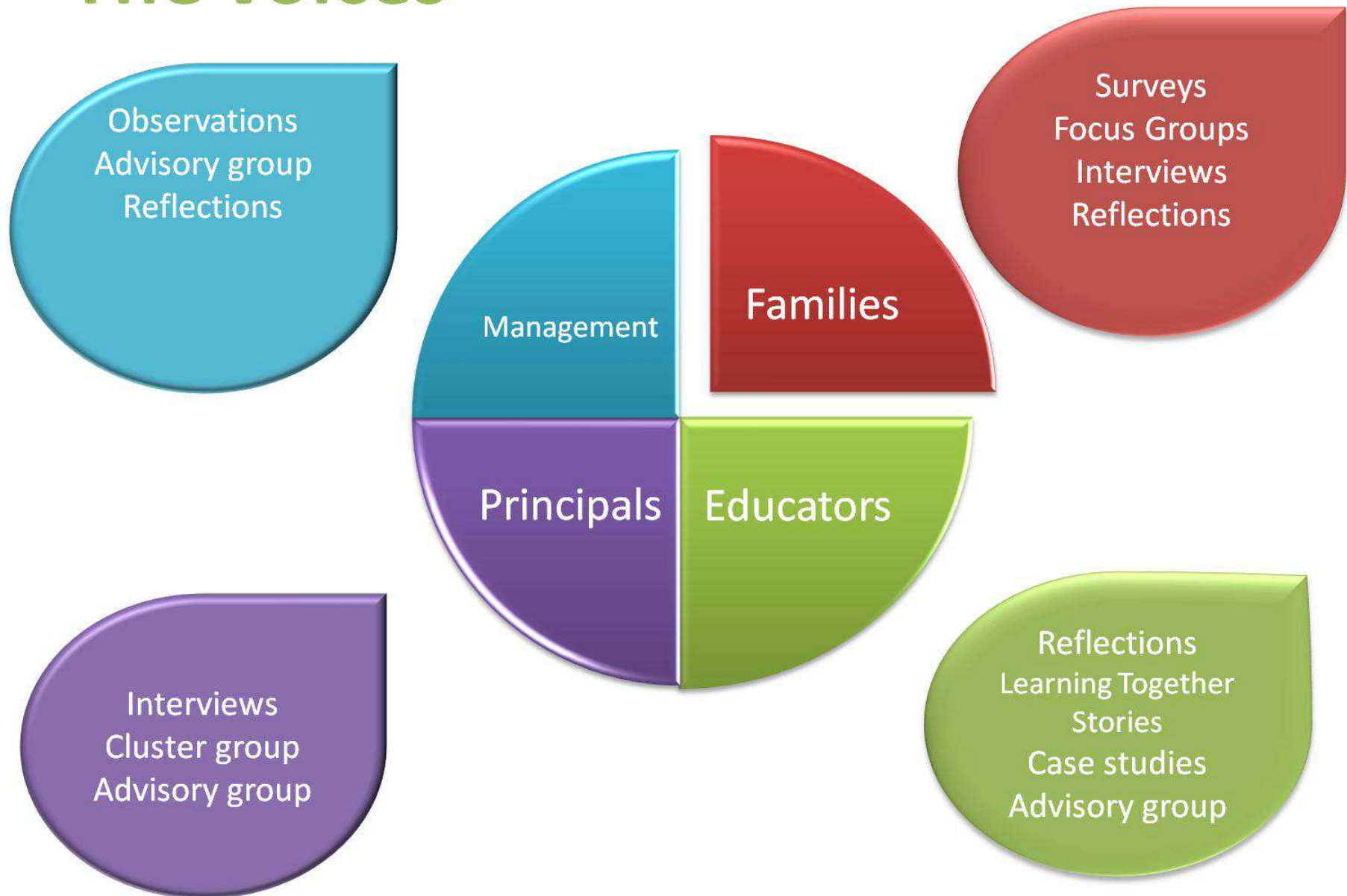
Activities

- Case studies
- Monthly, termly & annual reports
- Reflections

Resources

- Reflections
- Monthly, term & annual reports

The voices



Reflect Respect Relate

- This a resource that was developed by DECD
- Consists of four inter-related observation scales
- Used to measure quality in group settings rather than individual measures



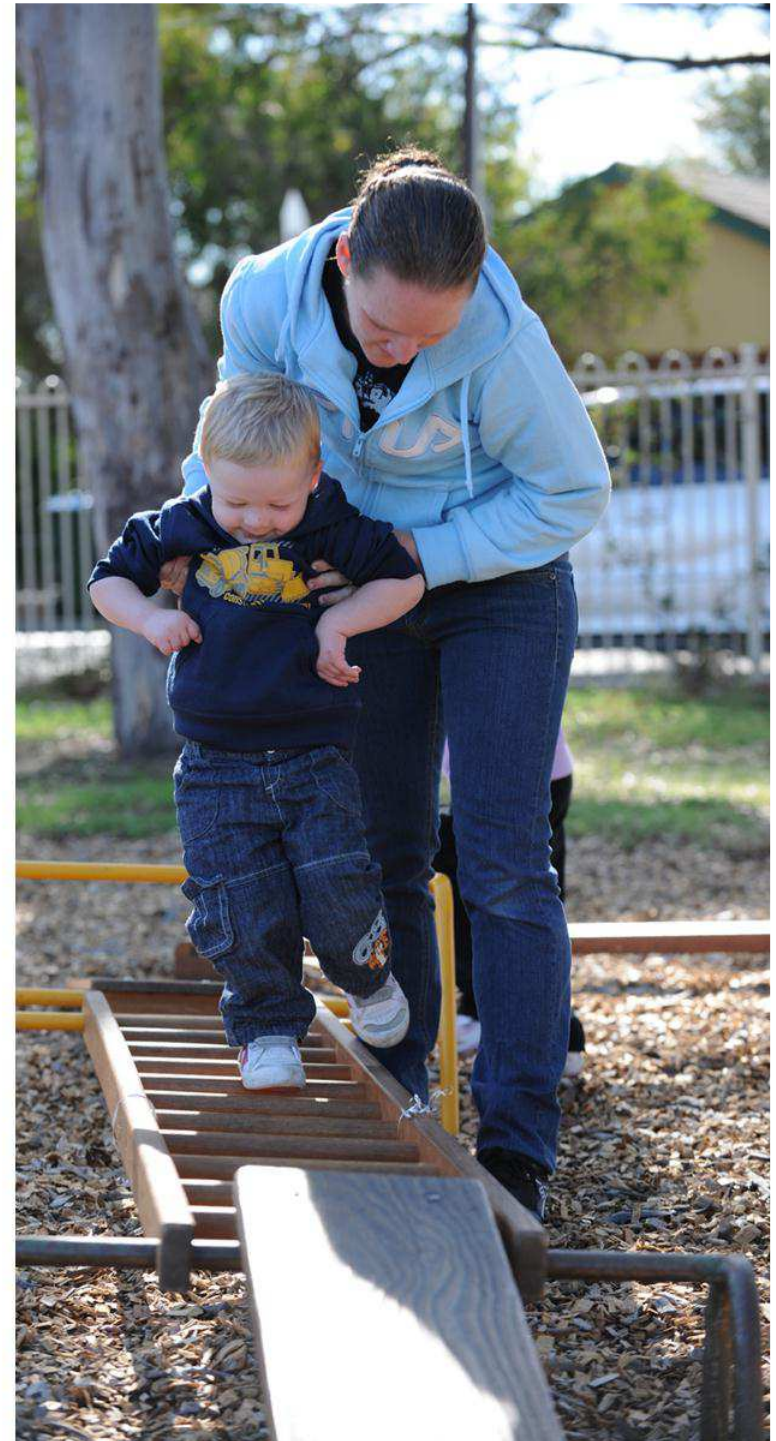
Relationships Scale

- 4 signals of quality in relationship
 - Responsiveness
 - Positive interactions
 - Quality verbal exchanges
 - Appropriateness
- The scale is used normally to assess the relationships that teachers have with children. We adapted it to look at parent child interactions

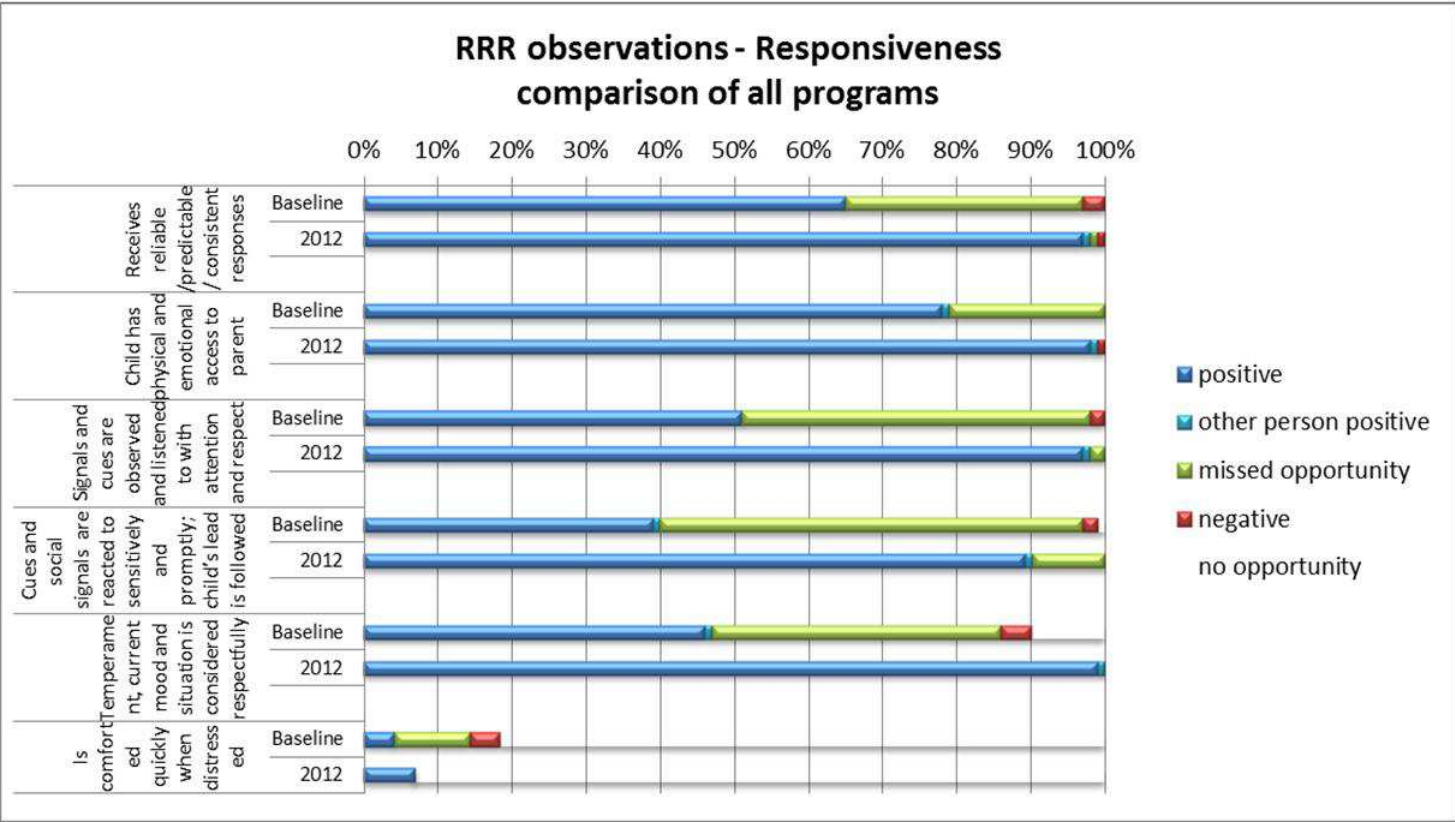


Indicators and Rating

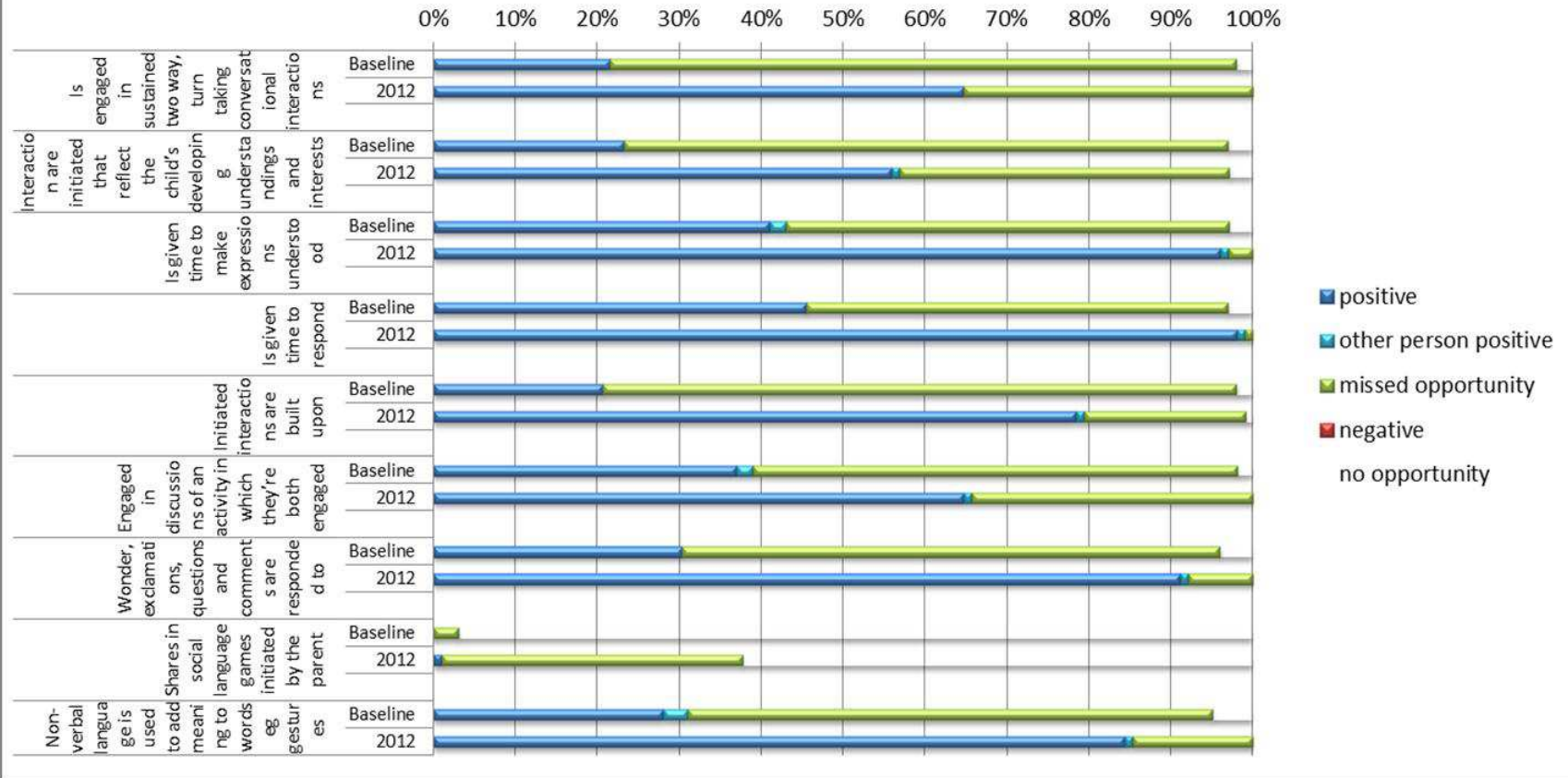
- Observers note positive/negative/missed opportunities/ no opportunities
- Each signal is given a rating of low, medium, high
- When these are aggregated a overall ranking is generated



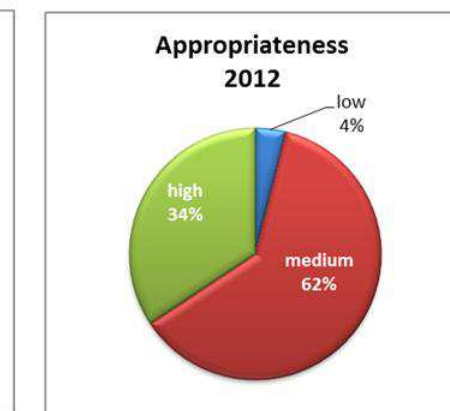
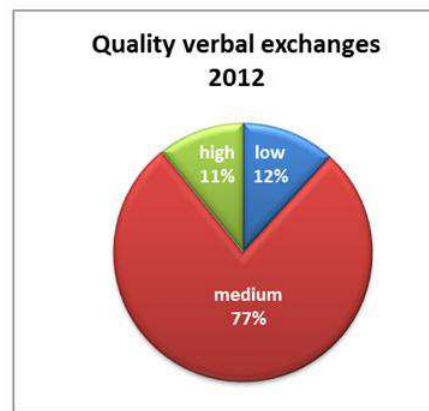
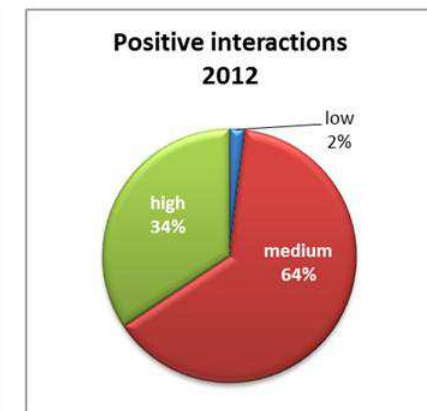
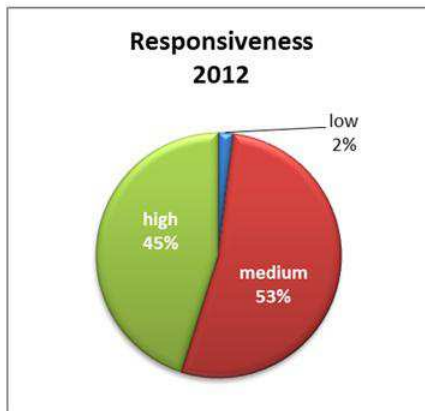
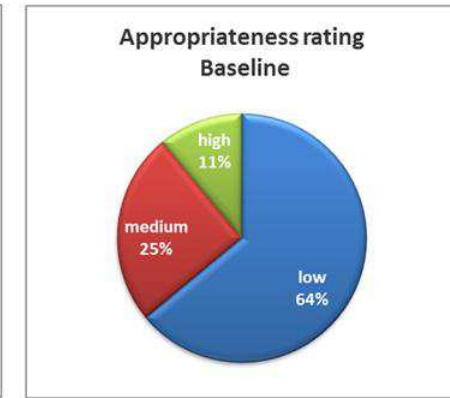
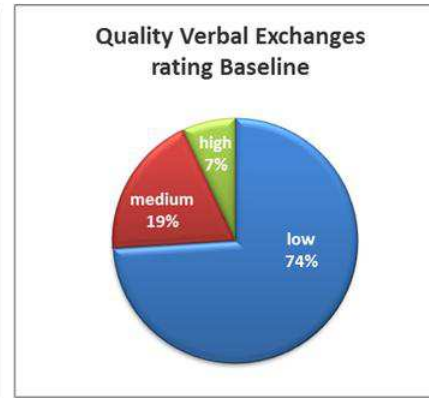
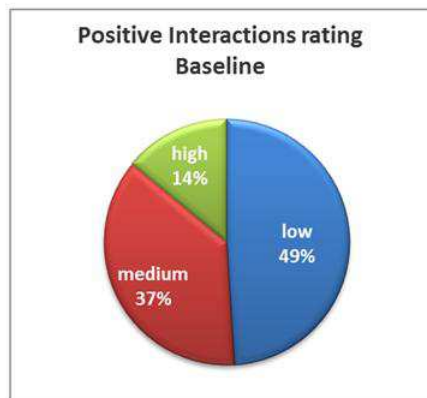
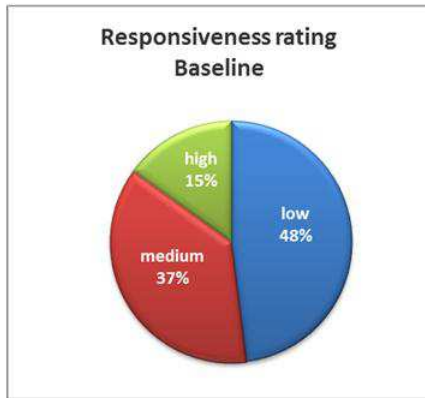
RRR Signals



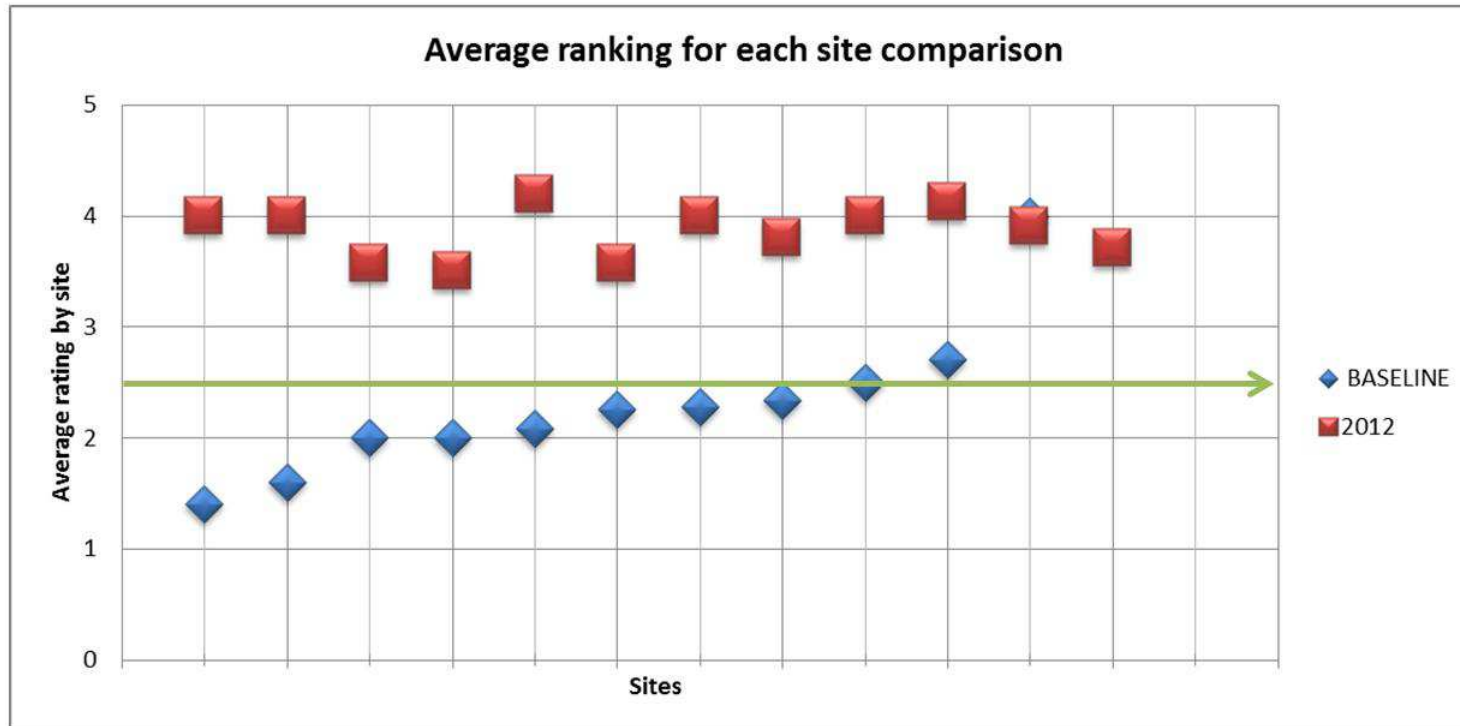
RRR observations - Quality verbal exchanges comparison of all programs



RRR ratings



RRR changes in rankings



Conclusion

Using these tools and Bennett's Hierarchy we have been able to demonstrate that involvement in Learning Together programs has a *significant* impact on

- family behaviours, knowledge and confidence, and thus on outcomes for their children.

We have been able to do this in ways that have meant many voices have been heard and stayed true to the tenets of the program.

