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## PARLER BAMBIN ('LITTLE TALKERS'), GRENOBLE

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This project helps develop the language skills of children under three years of age to reduce social and cognitive inequalities and, as a consequence, to prevent school drop-out and the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

**Background:** a pilot project in Grenoble revealed that 80% of children in deprived urban areas were below average in normal language development for their age. Cognitive development in the first three years is crucial for the further capacity for learning, so addressing language issues at this early stage reduces inequalities, prevents school failure and improves children's chances of breaking out of the cycle of poverty. A number of studies showed a strong link between poverty and a low level of language development in children. Language is also the main tool for all relationships: the number of words a person can make use of defines their capacity of expressing feelings and the accessibility to the world of adults; lack of words can lead to misunderstanding and frustration.

**Activities:** trained educators in 27 day-care facilities in the city of Grenoble make constant interactive conversation with babies and toddlers during the activities. In addition, the educators organise regular workshops with 2-3 toddlers identified as 'late talkers', where they encourage speaking using techniques that gradually introduce words. Grenoble's day-care facilities give a high priority to vulnerable families (40% of the toddlers).

**Outcomes:** an evaluation demonstrated strong impact of the project. A comparison between two groups of 50 similar children in two different day-care facilities showed improved speech in late talkers (+10 points in 6 months) in children who participated in 'Parler Bambin'. It also increased the attention that day-care staff pays to early-years language development. Moreover, the project raised awareness among parents of the need for good linguistic skills, in particular when French is not the mother tongue of either or both parents. It is expected that the project will bring long-term socio-economic benefits through cost-avoidance, but a formal evaluation is still on-going.



**Transferability:** in the pilot phase, the project was established in one facility for babies and toddlers in 2008, then evaluated and transferred in two other facilities in 2009. It was then gradually scaled up to 27 early-childhood services in Grenoble. When the tools and method were fully developed, the program was rolled out in other French cities that share

the same political objective of reducing child poverty: Lille in 2011, Rennes in 2012, Nantes and Le Havre in 2013. The project's transferability potential is high in all early childhood care facilities.

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