Enhancing Interaction Around Books

The importance of interaction around books

Young children may well use books alone, but as with all areas of early learning, interaction with others can enhance children’s enjoyment and achievement.

Parents, older siblings and other adults in the family can mediate the text in some books, offer the chance to relate the story to the child’s experience, initiate story book reading, pour over a book written for adults about wildlife, motorbikes, travel (or any such topic) and talk about the photographs. Such forms of interaction take the use of books on to new plains.

The approach to work with parents will vary according to parents’ needs and interests. Work on opportunities and, more particularly recognition, is likely to focus parents’ attention on the way they interact with their children around books. But there are specific ideas that can be planned and developed – some are more suited to ongoing initiatives, others can be part of a series of ‘special events’.

Some of the suggestions here involve parents reading and writing. For some parents these ideas may need to be adapted to allow for the possibility of spoken rather than written contributions. What is planned must always take account of parents’ literacy skills with ongoing sensitivity to the possibility
that some parents may struggle with aspects of literacy themselves. Appropriate information and support can be offered to parents who express an interest in developing their own literacy learning.

**Enhancing parents’ interaction with their children around books**

**Workshops**

Talking with parents in workshops about different ways of sharing books can also be helpful. Discussing ways of sharing books that help children can be of use to some parents. This is not to suggest a list of “do’s and don’ts” rather a sharing of what kinds of adult behaviour can contribute to positive book oriented interaction between parents and children.

Parents who are part of such discussions can then develop their own strategies with their children and return to a future meeting of the group to discuss their book interactions, what worked, which are most comfortable and which seem to offer most to their children.

**Share a book a week**

An extra dimension can be added to a book loan scheme by asking parents to focus on and record their comments about the way they shared one of the books they borrow each week. This builds on the work on recognition but also asks parents to think more about what they do as well as what their children can do.

Each family can be given a personalised record book designed for parents to write in and note what they do when they share a book with their children as well as their children’s reactions. Recording
everything that happens around every book is too much but focusing specifically on one book during each week can be manageable. The book and parents comments can be a starting point for individual discussion when parents and children exchange their loan books.

This can take time but when parents say things like: We really talked about this book – it reminded us of so many things and they continue, enthusiastically to use books with their children on a regular basis, it is worth trying to find ways of sustaining the effort.

Where and when?

Asking parents to describe when they share books with their children is one way of beginning dialogue about interaction and settings for sharing books. Sheet a gives some of the times and places that parents in one workshop said they shared books with their children. This sheet can be used as a starting point for group discussion with parents about where and when interactions over books might take place.

Focus on authors

A different approach to enhancing interaction is to focus more specifically on one or two authors. Reading a selection of stories written by the same author and facilitating discussion about their style and features of particular books they have written and/or illustrated can help parents to get ‘on the inside’ of children’s literature and spark more interest in discussion stories and illustrations with their children.

Author biographies and film clips are available, which feature different authors talking about their lives and work. This helps to turn them into ‘real’ people rather than simply a name on a book. They then have more to share and discuss with their children around books and the people that create them — seeking out with their children other titles by the same person. Many publishers provide biographical information and some authors and illustrators accept invitations to work with children and parents. Contact can be made with authors through their publishers.

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Sharing books with our children
- when and where?

In the kitchen
Bedtime
anywhere

Most evenings
After nursery
In bed – usually our bed!

Tea time
everyday
Any time of the day that seems right
On the settee
when there is quiet!