

Parents' Roles in Children's Literacy Development

What can parents provide to help their children's literacy development?

For decades, research has suggested that families are powerful influences on children's early literacy development (Douglas, 1964; Davie, Butler and Goldstein, 1972; Wedge and Prosser, 1973; Newson and Newson, 1977; Nutbrown, 1994; Weinberger, 1996).

Research and development work at the University of Sheffield has suggested that there are four main ways in which parents can help their children's literacy development (Hannon, 1995).

Opportunities

In the early years parents can provide vital learning *opportunities* for children's literacy development:

- Resourcing children's drawing or scribbling activities
- Encouraging their socio-dramatic play
- Exposing them to, and helping them interpret, environmental print
- Teaching nursery rhymes which aid speech segmentation and phonological awareness
- Sharing story books and other written materials
- Enabling children to participate in visits, trips or holidays which provide further literacy demands and opportunities

Recognition

Parents can provide unique encouragement for children in their *recognition* and valuing of children's early achievements in, for example:

- Handling books
- Reading
- Understanding logos
- Writing

It is important that parent can spot the early milestones as well as the achieved stages of literacy development.

Interaction

Parents need to *interact* with their children – supporting, explaining endorsing and challenging them to move on from what they know about literacy to do more. An important way of doing this is to involve children in real literacy tasks in which they can make a meaningful contribution (e.g. adding their 'name' to a greetings cards, turning the pages of a book) thereby enabling them to do 'today'

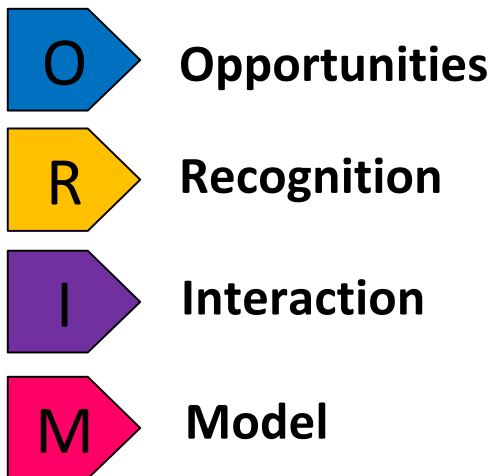
with an adult what 'tomorrow' they will be able to do independently. Other kinds of interaction include demonstrating, tuition, games and play.

Models of literacy users

Parents also act as powerful *models* if and when children see them using literacy, for example:

- Reading newspapers for information or enjoyment
- Writing notes or shopping lists
- Using print to find things out
- Using print to follow instructions
- Using literacy as part of their work (or working at home)

These four concepts: Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Model or *ORIM* can be used to think about ways parents can help their children.



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