A Framework for Early Literacy Work with Families

Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Models

Peter Hannon
Origins and Destinations
Tuesday 24th May 2011
ORIGINS
AND
DESTINATIONS

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About origins and destinations

*Early literacy work with families*

*Research and development*

Sheffield contribution since 1980s
Wider context – historically/nationally
What we have learned
Possible future directions
Collaborators

Hundreds of families
Dozens of centres and schools
Practitioner-researchers
University colleagues

Cathy Nutbrown, Jo Weinberger, Angela Jackson, Kath Hirst, Anne Morgan, Jackie Marsh, and many others
Inheritance and legacy

- Important to preserve a sense of history
- All practitioners/educators begin with an inheritance from previous generations
- Learning from what has gone before can help practice today and tomorrow
- Action today can be a legacy for the future
- Too many ‘Year Zero’ approaches - early years policies introduced/imposed as if there was no previous relevant history
What’s so important about literacy and the early years?
Literacy important because . . .

- Written language intrinsic to functioning of modern society
- A necessary condition for liberty?
- Essential for most families’ incomes
- Essential for social inclusion
- A key to learning and curricular access

Negative as well as positive aspects?
Early years important . . .

- Current schooling requires extensive use of literacy as early as possible
- Children can be turned on to literacy in preschool period
- Children can be turned off literacy in preschool period
- Preschool children curious about literacy as part of their environment
Implications

• Assist, in developmentally appropriate ways, early literacy learning
• As most young children are in families (broadly defined), work with families
• Value out-of-school and pre-school learning
• Innovative good practice, linking learning in-school to out-of-school.
What we need to develop good practice

Five requirements?
(In addition, of course, to funding)

1. Clear values and aims
2. Theory
3. Reflective, critical practice
4. Evaluation
5. Progression in practice
1. Clear values and aims

- Respect for families’ current literacy?
- Challenge primacy of school literacy?
- Reduction of literacy inequalities?
- Happier families?
- What are we trying to change? (If not sure, what on earth are we doing?)
2. Theory

“Nothing so practical as a good theory”

- Literacy is essentially social
- Literacy learning also social
- Becoming literate is about learning to use a cultural tool, i.e., about learning a cultural practice as well as a technical skill
- Family a prime site for children to acquire cultural tools

=> Socio-cultural view of literacy learning
A big question
How do others help us learn?

Learning is essentially **social**. Relatively little learning entirely individual (and even that often turns out to be social on closer inspection).

A **socio-cultural theory** of learning focuses on how groups (e.g., families) help individuals acquire cultural knowledge (e.g., of written language - literacy).
One view of learning to read

“Reading is whole-task learning right from the start. From first to last the child should be invited to behave like a reader, and those who want to help him [sic] should assume he can learn, and will learn, just as happened when he began to talk.”

Meek (1982)
“Reading is skilled behaviour and, like all skills, it has to be taught from the bottom up, from the simple parts to the complex whole. No one would dream of asking a novice diver to attempt a difficult dive like a reverse jacknife. Nor would one teach a beginning piano student to use all ten fingers at the first piano lesson.”

McGuinness (1998)
A classic statement of the socio-cultural view

“What the child can do in co-operation today he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening functions.”

Vygotsky (1986)
## Some characteristics of socio-cultural learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNERS BENEFIT FROM</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No opportunities, no learning – may require materials, situations, permission, practice.</td>
<td>Other people provide feedback and encouragement</td>
<td>Wide range possible – from facilitation (scaffolding) to instruction</td>
<td>Seeing how others do things; wanting to be like them.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Unpicking early literacy development

### SOME EARLY LITERACY STRANDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Oral Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental print</td>
<td>Good quality children’s books</td>
<td>Early mark making</td>
<td>Storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Picture books</td>
<td>Invented spellling</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverts</td>
<td>Story books</td>
<td>Writing to communicate</td>
<td>Phonological awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street signs</td>
<td>Non-fiction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Talk about written language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV texts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Junk mail</td>
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The ORIM framework

A way of understanding what we are trying to enhance or change in early literacy programmes
The ORIM framework

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Can we affect all cells?

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<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
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<td>Recognition</td>
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Back to what we need to develop good practice ....

1. Clear values and aims ✓
2. Theory ✓
3. Reflective, critical practice
4. Evaluation
5. Progression in practice
3. Reflective, critical practice

- Knowing **why** we do what we do
- Integration of values, aims and theory
- Being open to discussion/argument, including with families
- Not blindly following others’ formulae
- Being prepared to change – where there are good reasons
4. Evaluation

- Commitment to seeking information about success and ‘failure’
- Accepting that no ‘failure’ means no learning
- Resource budget for evaluation
- Many methods possible – from simply asking views to RCTs
- Checking basics (e.g. take-up) as well as outcomes (e.g. literacy measures).
5. Progression in practice

- Preparedness to change without being a victim of fashion or diktat
- Innovation without throwing away what’s been valuable in the past
- Learning from – and sharing with – others
- Hopefully, doing what we’re doing today in this conference . . . . .
## Origins of early literacy work with families

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Parental involvement in reading (Haringey, Belfield, paired reading). Emergent literacy perspective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>REAL Project. Preschool literacy intervention. BSA family literacy. ‘Literacy Hour’ in schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Family literacy initiatives. Emphasis on ‘skills’. Reduced funding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Now</td>
<td>Renewed interest in early intervention (and possibly in inequality). Theoretical bases contested.</td>
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Work at Sheffield

• Initial focus on parent involvement in teaching reading, **Belfield Reading Project**, 1979-87
  
• Focus widened to literacy (not just reading) and to preschool period. Emergent literacy view.

• **Early Literacy Development Project**, 1988-92
  
• Development of ‘ORIM’ framework


• Renewed interest in REAL Project and ORIM framework, 2008-11.
The REAL Project

Raising Early Achievement in Literacy

• Based in Sheffield, England
• Peter Hannon and Cathy Nutbrown
• Several phases, since 1990s
• Bilingual study, Kath Hirst
• Follow-up study, 2 yrs post-programme
• Research Fellow, Anne Morgan
• Other professionals (~8) contributed
Research background

- Inequalities in children’s literacy
- Literacy measures at school entry predict later attainment
- Preschool home learning important
- Potential of family literacy programmes
- Not all parents want adult education now
- Socio-cultural view of literacy development
REAL Project questions

• Is it feasible to develop early literacy work with families, based on socio-cultural view of development? (Can such a view be shared with parents?)
• Will parents, children and teachers value such a programme?
• Will the programme affect children’s literacy development?
• Will it affect parents’ literacy?
• Will any effects on children’s literacy persist?
Nature of the intervention

Preschool family literacy programme.
Low intensity long-duration.
Offered to families in disadvantaged areas.
No targeting of particular families, except in terms of area
Some families bilingual (9%)
Parents of 3-year-olds invited to join programme for 12-18 months before school entry
Adult education opportunities offered, not required
Programme, based on *ORIM* framework, consisted of

- Home visits by programme teachers
- Provision of literacy resources
- Centre-based group activities
- Special events (e.g. group library visit)
- Postal communication
- Optional, literacy-related adult education for parents

*Resourcing:* Teachers given half a day per week to work with a group of 8 families
More details about the REAL Project


Early literacy work with families.
London: SAGE Publications
Range of research methods

- Practitioner reflections and peer interviews
- Analysis of activity records
- Post-programme interviews of parents
- Post-programme interviews of children
- Randomised control trial to investigate effects on children’s literacy (N=176)
Measures of children’s development (for RCT)

- *Sheffield Early Literacy Development Profile* (SELDP) – Nutbrown (1997)
- *British Picture Vocabulary Scale* – Revised (BPVS – II)
- Letter recognition – Clay (1985)
- School Literacy Attainment at Seven – total of KS1 literacy assessments
Parents views of programme

- Overwhelmingly positive
- ‘Sad’ about programme ending
- Difficult to elicit any negative views
- Reported ‘global’ and specific benefits for children
- Did not think it was ‘like school’
- Would recommend it to other parents
Children’s experience

• Children in programme group reported greater range of literacy experiences than those in control group

• According to parent and teacher reports, children enjoyed programme
Teachers’ views

- Strongly welcomed the opportunity to work with families
- Cautiously positive about benefits to children and parents
Take-up and drop-out in REAL Project

• High take-up, low drop-out
• Low take-up of optional adult education component
• 10% of adults gained accreditation
• Participation rated by teachers
Levels of participation (teacher judgements)

5. Participated regularly - clear and continuing indications of activity between contacts.
4. Participated regularly - intermittently active between contacts/visits
3. Participated regularly - but virtually no indication of activity between contacts/visits.
2. Participated minimally or irregularly - very little work focused on literacy.
1. ‘Stopped out’ for one or more periods but did not withdraw from programme.
Number of families participating at different levels according to programme teachers' judgements (all programme families, N=85)

Number of families

Level 5: 38
Level 4: 23
Level 3: 17
Level 2: 4
Level 1: 3
High participation

• 92% of families participated ‘regularly’
• 45% at the highest possible level of participation.
Fathers in the REAL Project

• ‘Parent’ interviews mainly mothers on their own (a few with fathers present too, none with fathers on their own)
• Fathers’ home involvement explored through interviews with mothers
• 86% of children had a father or step father in their lives (not necessarily resident)
Fathers: REAL Project findings

- Visible *programme* participation low (9% centre-based attendance; 16% in home visits)
- Higher involvement with child reported in ongoing FL home *practices* (93%)
- 29% of fathers reported to help child as much as mother
- Fathers involved in all 4 ORIM roles (but less for Opportunities)
- Involvement related to socio-economic status
RCT design in REAL Project

• Full random allocation of families to programme and control groups
• Parents’ informed consent before invitations to join programme
• Initially, 88 3-yr-olds in each group
• Independent, double-blind assessment
• No pre-programme group differences
• Low and non-significant attrition
REAL Project findings

• Gains for children in programme group compared to control group
• Impact varied for different sub-groups
• Bilingual programme had high impact
• Fade-out of gains after 2 years (but not for all sub-groups)
Effect size varied for groups

Effect size

Whole sample
- In receipt of free school meals
- Boys
- Father lower SES
- Mother lower SES
- Mother reporting no educational qualifications

Pre-programme | End-of-programme | School follow-up

Effect size

-0.2 | 0 | 0.2 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 0.8 | 1 | 1.2
Where to next? Destinations

• Issues we’re discussing today are too big to go away
• Fashions, panics and innovations in early years’ practice will come and go but some fundamentals will remain
“You must remember this

The fundamental things apply
As time goes by”

Hupfeld (1931)
Where to next? Destinations

• Issues we’re discussing today are too big to go away
• Fashions, panics and innovations in early years’ practice will come and go but some fundamentals will remain
• Fundamentals include: reducing inequality; the importance of literacy, of early years, and of families.
Future practice:
five aspects for development

1. Targeting and reach
2. Outcomes
3. Gender
4. Changing nature of literacy
5. ‘Curriculum’ – content and rationale
Gender

- For ‘parents’, should we read ‘mothers’?
- Mothers appear more involved than fathers (virtually universal finding)
- Dilemma: discourse of ‘parents’ obscures gender imbalance but discourse of ‘mothers’ increases fathers’ exclusion.
- Need to be clear about our values and realistic about what can be achieved.
Changing nature of literacy

• The nature of literacy has been transformed in last three decades
• So how have FL programmes changed to keep up?
• Still oriented to paper and pencil technology and print literacy?
More on this later from Jackie Marsh
Impact of new technology

“Technology begins by making it easier to do familiar things; then it creates opportunities to do new things.”

Hannon (2000)

How has communication technology changed since the development of family literacy programmes 30 years ago?
What’s gone in past three decades?

Typewriters
Correction strips
Carbon paper
Duplicating machines (Roneo, Gestetner, Banda)
Telegrams
Fountain pens
Blotting paper

Vinyl records
Tape recorders
Tape-based video recorders
Roll film cameras
Punch card control of computers
Slide rules
Mechanical watches
OHPs Transparencies
What’s new in past three decades?

- Personal computers
- Word processing
- Mobile phones
- Texting
- Digital cameras
- Internet/WWW
- Websites
- Hypertext
- Electronic control of appliances
- GPS
- Satnav
- Twitter/Facebook/MySpace
- e-books/e-book readers
- Cordless phones
- CDs
- MP3 players
- Powerpoint
- Desktop publishing
- U-tube
- Touch screens
- TV remote controls
- Podcasts
- Virtual worlds
- Game machines
- Playstation
- Flash drives
- Memory cards
- 24-hour news
Future practice: five aspects for development

1. Targeting and reach ✓✓✓
2. Outcomes ✓✓✓
3. Gender ✓✓✓
4. Changing nature of literacy ✓✓✓
5. ‘Curriculum’ – content and rationale
Concluding thoughts

☼ This conference an opportunity for progress
☼ Grow new practice from what’s inherited
☼ Vast assembly of experience and expertise
☼ Also a national dimension
☼ Potential today for developments with national/international impact in future .....

Thank you for listening

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