The story of the REAL Project
past, present and future

Embedding Making it REAL: Practice sharing celebration event
Thursday 26 February 2015
Sheffield
National Children’s Bureau

Professor Cathy Nutbrown
School of Education,
The University of Sheffield

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The story begins...

Once upon a time... in a city in the northern part of a small country called England... there lived a man... who had an idea... he shared this idea with others and together the idea grew. This is the story of how an idea... was grown until it became something REAL.
Chapter 1: The Sheffield REAL Project 1995-2005

Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project

- Preschool family literacy programme.
- Low intensity, long duration.
- Offered to parents in disadvantaged areas.
- Some families bilingual (9%).
- Parents of 3-year-olds invited to join programme for 12-18 months before school entry.
Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project

Programme, based on the 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.

Teachers given half a day per week to work with a group of 8 families

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Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project


*Early literacy work with families.*

London: SAGE Publications
Main findings

• High take-up, low drop-out
• Parents and teachers very positive
• Low take-up of optional adult education component
• 10% of adults gained accreditation
• Significant effect on children’s literacy
• Effects varied for different groups

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Effect size varied for groups
REAL Project – Implications

- Families value a family literacy programme
- Positive impact on children’s literacy
- Not all parents want ‘two-generation’ programme
- Effects vary for different sub-groups
REAL Project - implications

In addition to funding, we need five things to develop good practice:

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

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1. Clear values and aims

- Respecting families’ current literacy
- Challenging the primacy of school literacy
- Reducing literacy inequalities?
- Happier families?
- Clarity about what are we trying to change?
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 - learning a cultural practice as well as a technical skill
- Home is a prime site for children to acquire cultural tools

=> Socio-cultural view of literacy learning
A socio-cultural view of learning

“What the child can do in co-operation today (s)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>
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<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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Unpicking early literacy development

### SOME EARLY LITERACY STRANDS

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<th>Print</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Oral Language</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Environmental print</td>
<td>Good quality children’s books</td>
<td>Early mark making</td>
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<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Picture books</td>
<td>Invented spelling</td>
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<td>Adverts</td>
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<td>Non-fiction</td>
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<td>Junk mail</td>
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<td>Phonological awareness</td>
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<td>Talk about written language</td>
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The ORIM framework

The ORIM Framework is a way of understanding what we are trying to enhance or change in early literacy programmes.

It can assist in planning and evaluating work with families.
# The ORIM framework

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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
• Embedding and developing. . . . .
Chapter 2: Making it REAL  2009-2012

Led by Helen Wheeler, the Early Childhood Unit (ECU) at the National Children’s Bureau collaborated with the University of Sheffield, and Oldham and Sheffield local education authorities, on the successful three-year lottery-funded Making it REAL project.

This has had a powerful impact on children’s educational outcomes. The children involved in Making it REAL are all now in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes in primary school. Teachers report how much more involved and focused they are; they have a real chance to succeed and build confidence as learners. Oldham are investing in more REAL projects from January 2012 in areas of low educational attainment, and schools and centres in Sheffield are sustaining REAL home visits and events.

The Early Childhood Unit continues to support local authorities who wish to embed REAL as an approach to family literacy work, and work with families to support the education and development of young children.
Making it REAL 2009-2012

Making it REAL was the winner of the Early Years category in the Children and Young People Now Awards 2012.

Recognition for work with over 300 families.

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Chapter 3: A Framework for Early Literacy Development With Parents

A Framework for Early Literacy Development with Parents (April 2011 to March 2012) and was funded by a Knowledge Exchange grant from the Economic and Social Research Council.

It sought to build on the Sheffield REAL project by exploring how a new generation of early years practitioners could make meaningful use of the ORIM Framework to support their work with parents to promote early literacy development.

The project was directed by Professor Cathy Nutbrown of the University of Sheffield in collaboration with Julia Bishop, Helen Wheeler and 20 early years practitioners.
Aims

- to identify key strengths of the ORIM Framework which would enhance their work with families in a range of early childhood settings.

- to facilitate the adaptation and use of the ORIM Framework into current family literacy practices and new curriculum areas, and for use with families and a range of practitioners nationwide.

- to encourage the use of, and contribution to, the Sheffield REAL project website, in partnership with the Early Childhood Unit of the National Children’s Bureau, so that the project outcomes, combined with existing resources for the REAL project, would create an internationally available resource.

- to create an ongoing discussion, through joint working, group discussions and innovations of practitioners and researchers, in order to establish a democratic and two-way process of knowledge exchange.

Three project residential events provided a space to appraise with practitioners the ways in which they had used and adapted the ORIM Framework for work with children and families on literacy and other curriculum areas.
Outcomes

By the end of the project, the twenty practitioners who took part had shared the ORIM Framework with some 300 other practitioners and 6000 families.
And another prize!

In May 2013, the *Framework for Early Literacy Development with Parents* was awarded the ESRC prize for outstanding impact on society.
Chapter 4: ORIM in WF13 (2012–2013)

- Working with bilingual children and families
- A collaborative partnership between The University of Sheffield, Kirklees Local Authority and three preschool settings
ORIM in WF13

In this 6-month project, funded by the University of Sheffield, three bilingual preschool settings in the WF13 postcode area of Dewsbury, West Yorkshire.

Working with Kay Davies, the Kirklees LA Early Years Consultant, the ORIM Framework was used to raise the outcomes of children’s early literacy learning.

Practitioners reflected on their engagement with parents and families and planned interactions to engage all children and their families in supporting early language and literacy development.

As reflective practitioners, they asked themselves “What stops 100% of our parents from engaging with us about our children’s early literacy development?” Then they set about securing 100% engagement with families.
Chapter 5: Making it REAL 2013-2015

• The Early Childhood Unit (ECU) received funding from the DfE National Prospectus Grant (2013-2015) to deliver the Making it REAL Roll-Out project which sets out to improve the quality of early education and care of young children.

• The project is delivered in conjunction with PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years), Pre-school Learning Alliance, and NDNA (National Day Nurseries Association).

• In 2013-14, the Making it REAL project delivered free training and development work in 8 local authorities, reaching 1600 participants.

• In 2014-15, ECU is continuing more focused work in 8 local authority areas, including training for practitioners, home visits and literacy events for local families. Innovation projects include developments in supporting two-year olds, parent volunteers and early mathematics. A further 70 free one-day training courses across the country, 2 large-scale regional training events and 2 practice-sharing events.
Chapter 6: Family Literacy Fun Day (ESRC Festival of Social Science 2013)

As part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science, the School of Education at the University of Sheffield organised a day of Family Literacy Fun. The event was held at the Sheffield Winter Garden on Saturday, 2 November 2013 and involved lots of free activities for under 5s and their families.
Chapter 7: A timeline of REAL and ORIM

1979-87 *Belfield Reading Project* Initial focus on parent involvement in teaching reading.

1988-92 *Early Literacy Development Project* The focus widened to ‘emergent literacy’ (not just reading) and to preschool period.

1995-2005 *The Sheffield REAL Project* Several phases. Engagement with many practitioners. RCT and qualitative evaluation.
Chapter 7: A timeline of REAL and ORIM

2009–12  **Making it REAL** Helen Wheeler and the Early Childhood Unit (ECU) at the National Children’s Bureau collaborated with the University of Sheffield and Oldham and Sheffield local education authorities on a successful three-year lottery-funded project.

2011–2012  **A Framework for Early Literacy** ESRC-funded project involving 20 practitioners and reaching 6,000.

2012 – 2013  **ORIM in WF13** Bilingualism and 3 preschools in Dewsbury.

2013  **Family Literacy Fun** – the Winter Garden, Sheffield – 400 families.

Chapter 8: The future

• Home learning environment
• Collaboration
• Policy
• Early Intervention
• Inheritance and legacy
Chapter 8: The future

Home learning environment

Early education is not a magic bullet in relation to closing the attainment gap. It should be considered alongside other interventions. The role of the home learning environment is critical in a child’s development. Early education needs to be accompanied by programmes to support families in providing a positive home learning environment. We recommend the Government considers how such programmes could be established alongside the free early education entitlement. [para 6, p. 9]
Chapter 8: The future

Collaboration
Chapter 8: The future

Policy

Policy change is in the hands of practitioners. Policy may be made in Whitehall, but it is shaped and enacted by practitioners, families, communities and early years settings.

Be a POLICY HOLDER!
Chapter 8: The future

Early Intervention

A national conference on Early Intervention: Right for Children, Better for the Economy was held in London on 12th February 2015. The message was that Early Intervention is essential to prevent later and more costly intervention to resolve social difficulties, health, employment and levels of crime.

With the main political parties signing up to endorse the importance of early intervention, the strong common message is that early intervention makes economic sense. However, seeing EI merely as a series of programmes targeted to address potential deficit is to miss the opportunity to embrace the importance of well-informed and confident practitioners working holistically with families.
Chapter 8: The future

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.
Epilogue

Relationships

and

Partnerships

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Further information


To join the ORIM network please email ORIM@sheffield.c.uk

For more REAL and ORIM related projects visit   http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk

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