

Real progress

What next for literacy project Making it REAL? *Joyce Connor*, from the National Children's Bureau's Early Childhood Unit, looks at how the training has been enhanced for two-year-olds

In November 2012, Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) received the *Children & Young People Now* Early Years Award for its Big Lottery-funded work in Sheffield and Oldham. But over a year on, what has happened to the innovative early literacy programme? In particular, how is the project now meeting the literacy development needs of two-year-olds?

Based on the work of Professors Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Hannon at the University of Sheffield, Making it REAL is intended to equip early years practitioners with knowledge about early literacy development, that they can then hand over to parents. It is delivered by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) in conjunction with the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, Pre-school Learning Alliance, and National Day Nurseries Association.

The project enables parents to support their children's early literacy development through using the ORIM framework (Hannon, 1995; Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan 2005).

THE ORIM FRAMEWORK

ORIM stands for Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Model. Participants in Making it REAL learn that parents can be supported to provide opportunities for children's literacy development – for example, giving children books and mark-making materials, and CDs or DVDs of nursery rhymes.

They learn about early literacy development and how to support parents to recognise and value early achievements in skills like early reading, such as spotting letters and logos and about.

When parents do things together with their children such as writing a birthday card or postcard, they are interacting with their children on literacy and when they make sure their children see them using literacy in



everyday life, such as reading a paper or writing a shopping list, they are a model of literacy use.

When overlaid with the key strands of early literacy development, environmental print (recognising printed words in the environment), books, early writing and oral language, the ORIM framework can be used to describe how particular families support their children's literacy (or other aspects of their development) and to plan work with parents.

PARENTS AND HOME LEARNING

A central idea of Making it REAL is that parents are a child's first and most enduring educators. Parents and families are the most important people in children's lives. They have the greatest influence over them, particularly in the early years. What parents do at home with their very young children has a major impact on their social, emotional and intellectual development. So practitioners are encouraged to consider how to engage with parents using home visits and events to help them work with families and reflect and plan using the ORIM framework.

Practitioners have shared stories of home visits improving parents' confidence and knowledge, of warm welcomes and invitations to share food, of meeting fathers for the first time

and, most importantly, of children and parents engaging in literacy after the visit.

Home visits have also enabled sensitive conversations about child development issues to take place and, as a consequence, practitioners have been able to refer parents to other services, such as speech and language support.

REAL AND TWO-YEAR-OLDS

Previous experiences with Making it REAL have shown that younger children also benefit from this approach to developing literacy. This is particularly important as early years settings engage with more disadvantaged two-year-olds receiving up to 15 hours a week of state-funded childcare.

The original REAL material was developed by Professors Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Hannon for their project in Sheffield, for children aged three to five years. The NCB Making it REAL projects in Oldham and Sheffield began to integrate two-year-olds from 2010 and this work has been further piloted and embedded within the current training.

There are many debates about the right way to introduce literacy activities to such young children, but key to all good practice is a thorough understanding and knowledge of child development, ensuring that activities

Parents are supported to provide opportunities for literacy development (above and right); a trip to a park is used to point out signs, logos, images and patterns (below)





MORE INFORMATION

For further information on Making it REAL, visit www.ncb.org.uk/areas-of-activity/early-childhood/projects-and-programmes/making-it-real-2013-15

are appropriate for two-year-olds, and this has been emphasised in the revised training materials for Making it REAL.

The experiences of the pilot work with two-year-olds have led to several adaptations of the training – focusing, for example, on resources for practitioners who feel they need more support with general language development at age two, examples of conversations that might happen between parents and practitioners about learning, and resources to address the earlier stages of development in writing, with extra practice examples of home visits and events.

PROJECT DELIVERY

Now funded by the Department for Education (DfE) National Prospectus Grants programme, Making it REAL has been rolled out to local authorities and settings across the country. Free training has been offered to 1,600 participants across 65 local authority areas. Participants include childminders, teachers, nursery staff, early years advisors, school-based practitioners and children's centre staff.

In addition, more than 100 teachers and practitioners are now working with children and families in eight local authority-based Making it REAL projects. Since April 2013, 66

schools, nurseries, and children's centres have been engaged in home visits and literacy events.

These projects have already shown an impact on:

- relationships with parents and their willingness to engage in literacy activities
- children's confidence and communication, with many children talking more at nursery after a home visit
- practitioners' awareness of children's individual interests and circumstances.

WHAT'S NEXT?

A further strand of the project has involved working with volunteer parents. Training is being developed to enable them to take part in projects in whatever way they feel comfortable, from encouraging other parents to get involved, to working alongside practitioners at events and visits.

Making it REAL is also producing materials to enable the ORIM framework to be used more widely to support early mathematics. From next month, the second year of DfE funding will enable Making it REAL to hold further training days and regional events, and the new developments will be integrated into work with local authorities. ■

REAL AND TWO-YEAR-OLDS IN PRACTICE

A visit by a family with their Making it REAL practitioners to the local park

A family trip presents great opportunities to build early literacy skills. Practitioners describe how they point out signs and logos in the shop and on the walk, and take photographs of the journey, focusing on anything the child notices and is interested in – road signs, door numbers, images, streets signs and patterns.

They have a picnic in the park and enjoy a series of activities with the '3 Bs' – bubbles, balls and buckets. Taking the opportunity to encourage the child to blow and catch bubbles, they emphasise descriptive language, and explain to parents how blowing

bubbles helps to develop tongue and mouth muscles that aid speaking.

The pictures taken on the way to and in the park are printed out and given to parents to make a simple book titled, 'On the way to the park I saw...' to be shared with their children to reinforce the language and experience.

Practitioners from a children's centre talk about the impact of home visiting

'I admit that there have been a few challenges in organising the home visits and getting used to that way of working, but the effects they have had have been amazing. It has had a positive impact on things that aren't even part of the project.

'In one case, we visited a parent who had been referred to another service to support her child, but she hadn't really got on with the professional there and had stopped going. However, because we gave her the time to talk about it and explained how important this support might be, she decided to give it another try.

'Another child was so much more engaged and interested in centre activities, even after just one home visit. It really has made a huge difference to him.'

Staff from a day nursery describe the impact of an event based on books and oral language

'We began by inviting in a bilingual storyteller to work with a group of parents and children in the setting. Lots of

our parents share the same home language and many of our children come to the setting at an early stage of learning English.

'The storyteller began in English and the children were all quite quiet and shy, sitting close to their parents. But when she began using their home language, they all just came alive! They were suddenly so lively and enthusiastic, even some children we had hardly heard speak before.

'The storyteller came from the library and she talked to the parents about how to register and borrow books. Lots of the parents did not even know that the library was nearby or that they could use it for their children, so we will be going there together soon.'