

# Family literacy project exceeds expectations

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A unique approach to early literacy work with families where children develop their language skills and their ability to read and write from an early age has had a huge success.

Researchers from the University of Sheffield funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) initially planned to use the approach with around 60 families, but discovered that around 6,000 had actually benefited from their work.

Professor Cathy Nutbrown of the University of Sheffield, who led the project, shared her approach to family [literacy](#) with Early Years practitioners including nursery workers, teachers, child-minders and family support units to help them plan and evaluate their family literacy work.

A report by the National Literacy Trust in May this year found that [children](#) in the UK are more likely to lack the basic reading and writing skills than children in Australia or Canada - even though the UK spends four per cent of its [Gross Domestic Product](#) (GDP) on family benefits relating to children compared to 1.2 per cent in the USA and 1.4 per cent in Canada.

The Sheffield research team further developed the 'ORIM Framework in the Raising Early Achievement in Literacy' project in the late 1990s. The framework focuses on four key elements: opportunities, recognition, interaction and models (ORIM). The key to the framework is that it highlights parents' roles and offers ideas for how they can help their

child.

1. Opportunities included resources for engaging with literacy such as books, writing materials, and use opportunities to see and discuss printed work.
2. Recognition showed parents the small steps in literacy progress their children were making to encourage their efforts.
3. Interaction outlined situations where parents could positively involve themselves in literacy activities - writing birthday cards, saying nursery rhymes, reading stories or spotting print images in the [neighbourhood](#).
4. Modelling was where the parents lead by example and their children could see that they were using reading, writing and print in everyday life.

Around 20 practitioners learned the theory behind the practical work they do and how it can benefit children's literacy. They agreed to adopt the framework and report back on its application, how they adapted it, and impact. Most said that it helped promote many activities including enhancing parents' recognition of the reading behaviour in three and four year-old bilingual children, encouraging talk in two year olds and encouraging young, reluctant boys to begin communicating with writing.

"We have been excited to see how the Early Years practitioners involved in this project are taking our ideas and developing them further to work with parents who have young children, so that they can help develop their interest in literacy from an early age," says Professor Nutbrown.

Professor Nutbrown was delighted to discover that the initial 20 practitioners had shared the approach with some 300 colleagues, far more than anticipated. She added: "This has greatly exceeded our expectations and by the end of the project the new approach reached

over 6,000 families."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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