

<b>Institution:</b> University of Sheffield
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 25 - Education
<b>Title of case study:</b> Raising Early Achievement in Literacy
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The most significant impact of the REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) programme of research has been the increased literacy engagement of over 150,000 young children in the UK and internationally, which has been achieved through direct influence upon practitioners, charities and families. The underpinning research demonstrated how young children's literacy development could be enhanced through work with families, particularly in disadvantaged communities. The impacts of the research during the assessment period have been recognised through the inaugural <b>2013 ESRC Outstanding Impact in Society Prize</b> (awarded to Nutbrown May 2013) and the <b>2012 Children and Young People Early Years Award</b> (awarded to NCB November 2012).</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The impacts described below arise from a 20-year research programme at Sheffield led by Hannon and Nutbrown involving Hirst (PhD student 1995-2002) and Morgan (RA 2004-2005). The research has been reported in 19 publications since 1995 (4 research journal articles, 7 professional journal articles, 3 books and 5 in other formats – DVD, professional manual, conference papers, website). Theoretical foundations were originally established by Peter Hannon (R6) who synthesised previous relevant research and, together with Cathy Nutbrown developed a conceptual framework in the late 1990s (R4 and R5).</p> <p>This innovative conceptual framework, 'ORIM', an acronym (now well known in the field) refers to four key aspects of families' support for children's literacy development: <b>O</b>pportunities for learning, <b>R</b>ecognition of learners' progress, <b>I</b>nteraction to facilitate learning, and <b>M</b>odels provided by those more proficient in using literacy. These four encapsulate, in accessible form, a socio-cultural view of development (as such, applicable to domains of learning other than literacy). The conceptual framework also identified various strands of early literacy development that the research sought to enhance: children's experience of books, engagement with environmental print, early mark making and writing, and oral language (including phonemic awareness, storying and talk about literacy). By applying ORIM to each strand, it was possible to acknowledge families' existing support for literacy as well as aspects of it that could be enhanced through REAL methods. In Phase 1 of the REAL Programme, this approach was tested in collaboration with practitioners from some 30 schools and centres in Sheffield and found to be feasible and valuable (R4).</p> <p>REAL methods, their implementation, and a comprehensive multi-method evaluation of their effectiveness, were reported by Nutbrown, Hannon &amp; Morgan (R3). A central component of the evaluation, that contributed hugely to the subsequent impact of the REAL research, was a Randomised Control Trial study (N=176) of changes in children's end-of-project literacy achievement. It was the largest preschool education RCT ever conducted in the UK and revealed significant end-of-project effect sizes, particularly for children of mothers with limited education for whom gains persisted two years after the project.</p> <p>The framework has been refined on an ongoing basis through empirical research conducted in partnership with key users, in projects funded through the Big Lottery Fund (Making It REAL, 2009-12) and the ESRC Follow-On Fund (A Framework for Early Literacy Work With Families, 2011-12). Another strand of the work with bilingual communities was supported by a HEIF R&amp;I award (ORIM: New Directions and Networks, 2012-2013). This work has consolidated and enriched the original theoretical research, ensuring that it could be effectively translated into practice in a range of settings.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <p>R1. Hirst, K., Hannon, P. and Nutbrown, C. (2010) Effects of a preschool bilingual family literacy programme. <i>Journal of Early Childhood Literacy</i>, 10 (2) 1–26</p> <p>R2. Morgan, A., Nutbrown, C. and Hannon, P. (2009) Fathers' involvement in young children's literacy development: implications for family literacy programmes, <i>British Educational</i></p>

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*Research Journal*, 35:2, 167-185

- R3. Nutbrown, C., Hannon, P. and Morgan, A. (2005) *Early Literacy Work with Families: research, policy and practice*. London: Sage.
- R4. Hannon, P., and Nutbrown, C. (1997) Teachers' use of a conceptual framework for early literacy education with parents. *Teacher Development*, 1 (3), 259-272.
- R5. Nutbrown, C. (1997) *Recognising early literacy development*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- R6. Hannon, P. (1995) *Literacy, home and school: research and practice in teaching literacy with parents*. London: The Falmer Press.

#### 4. Details of the impact

In the period from 2008-2013, the REAL research programme has had a variety of important impacts. Most significantly, thousands of children have benefitted from the research, raising their literacy engagement as a result of better-informed parental support and enhanced practitioner involvement. The critical pathway towards this major impact involves influencing the work of *children's charities* in terms of providing a robust evidence base to inform their activities; *practitioners* in terms of new skills and knowledge in working with parents on literacy; and *parents* in terms of increased confidence and enhanced knowledge about how to help their children.

#### Influencing Children's Charities

After successfully demonstrating the value and feasibility of REAL methods, particularly through the results of the RCT [R3] Nutbrown was able to disseminate the research findings to a range of influential charitable organisations in the UK, broadening the reach of the impact beyond those families involved in the underpinning research. Methods and outcomes were disseminated through professional and academic conferences, journal articles, involvement in advisory boards and a book (R3). This led to an ongoing relationship with PEEP that reached children in some 150,000 families (S7). This established a way of working with children's charities that has informed more recent work with NCB and Booktrust. These organisations have been instrumental in facilitating the roll-out of REAL methods across the UK and internationally.

For instance, *The National Children's Bureau* (NCB) instigated and ran a major early literacy project entitled 'Making it REAL' (Big Lottery Fund, 2009 – 2012), drawing heavily upon the methods and conceptual framework developed by Hannon and Nutbrown. This project involved 60 practitioners and 680 children (around 500 families). The NCB also drew heavily upon the REAL research programme [S1] in successfully applying for a Department for Education *National Prospectus Grant* (2013-2015) which has funded a national roll out of free training on REAL project methods in different locations around the country. Through this project, a total of 3,800 practitioners will be trained, 256 of whom will deliver small scale projects using REAL Project methods with families in their Local Authorities. The NCB have also developed eight specific projects with local authorities in which "1024 children and families will take part directly in home visits and literacy events, and a further 1024 in additional literacy activities. All 70 training offers in year 1 have been booked by local authorities, a sign of the relevance and enthusiasm generated for this approach to early literacy and work with parents." Furthermore, the NCB describe the research undertaken by Hannon and Nutbrown, and in particular the evidence provided by the RCT [R3] as being pivotal in them securing funding for their work in practice development. [S1]

In the case of *Booktrust* staff have attended various courses, conferences and seminars (run by Nutbrown) on REAL project methods. *Booktrust's* recent award winning project *Bookstart Corner* (2011-2013) includes REAL project methods to support children's centres across England to help families with children aged 12-30 months that need the most support to enjoy reading together; some 2,000 children's centres have registered. *Booktrust* online materials and a project manual cite and draw on REAL web-based materials and feature REAL Project methods and ORIM as a key element of the programme (S3). As a further indicator of the influence of the REAL programme of research, Nutbrown has recently (June 2013) been commissioned by *Booktrust* to evaluate a new family literacy initiative (2013-14).

### Enhancing Knowledge and Skills of Practitioners

Since 2008, the ORIM framework and REAL methods have been disseminated to practitioners through their adoption by the organisations described above, 2 training conferences and 3 residential workshops run by Nutbrown, and online resources ([www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk](http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk)). These events have directly reached over 350 practitioners, while the REAL website has generated nearly 3,000 unique visitors between 01.09.2011 and 18.06.2013 from United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Germany, Canada, Ireland, India, China, Philippines. The impact of this provision has snowballed, as demonstrated in the example below.

Through an ESRC Follow-On Fund project '*A Framework for Early Literacy Work with Families*' (2011-12), 20 practitioners worked with Nutbrown to further develop REAL Project Methods, through a number of residential workshops. They then shared these methods with around 300 other practitioners who used them to develop family literacy events and projects with some 6,000 families. One practitioner typically commented: "... *doing this project has given me the confidence to think: 'I can do that' [train others to use the framework and do home visiting]... I wouldn't have had the confidence to think that I could pass on that experience before.*" Interviews with 20 practitioners involved in the ESRC project indicated that they felt better equipped to work with families as a result of using REAL project methods. They have changed what they do, for example, one teacher explained: '*We are using it in school with parents and the ones we do are playing and learning together. ... It is useful framework for explain to parents what it is they are bringing when they are helping their children*'. They use the ORIM framework as the basis of much of their work, for example, in one private nursery the practitioner said: '*...we're running workshops now in the evenings, and also I think that it's just generally developed relationships with the parents.*' These practitioners have been working with Nutbrown to write a series of 8, one page articles on using REAL project methods for *Teach Nursery*, a magazine with a circulation of 18,000 monthly.

Kirklees Council have worked closely with Nutbrown to use the ORIM framework (2012-13) in one of the most deprived wards in the UK. Their Early Learning Consultant has stated "*the power of the REAL approach and ORIM model comes from its flexibility; the principles can be used in creative ways and adapted to the needs of local communities and schools. Throughout all of our work Professor Nutbrown acted as the leader (the clarity and depth of her thinking is inspirational), supporter (being interested in new developments and relishing the 'evidence' from the ground) and inquisitor (encouraging us to be analytical in our approach and use the ORIM framework as an evaluation tool).*" They have incorporated the ORIM framework into their core training for early years staff, and are "*noticing real change in practitioner and teacher attitudes*". [S4].

Overseas, there are other initiatives that have explicitly used the ORIM framework, usually in conjunction with other REAL Project methods: Canada (PRINTS in Newfoundland; National Family Literacy Centre, Edmonton; Family Learning Centre, Calgary); Portugal (A PAR); Ireland (Clare Family Learning Project).

### Increasing Confidence and Enhancing Knowledge of Parents

One of the core findings of the original research was the importance of parental input in children's early literacy development. As a result of the influence on practitioners described above, well over 150,000 families (S1, S3, S7) have been reached by the ORIM framework within the UK, who use it in their own homes. Through the National Children's Bureau's, *Making It REAL* project (2009-12), - a national roll-out of REAL methods and concepts, impacting on over 300 families – significant benefits can be evidenced. Parents' confidence and knowledge in how to help their children learn, and in engagement with centres has been enhanced. All report now doing more with their children, and awareness that everyday activities offer opportunities to learn (123 families remained active throughout). This compares favourably to other family learning approaches (e.g. family literacy courses requiring regular attendance combined with adult literacy tuition). 59% of parents now attend events regularly at the centres, and 75% are confident in talking to teachers and practitioners (compared to 15% and 37% before the project began). 163 parents and prime carers (including 34 fathers) took part regularly in home visits, and many more attended events. Additional benefits have included links for families to other local services. Places have, for example, been taken up on the Government's two-year-old pilot of free places and parents have

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enrolled on English language classes, and at local libraries, thereby having an impact on the participants within the projects as well as a result of subsequent development.

Testimonials from REAL projects in Oldham also provide evidence for this claim, with parents recognising that *“scribble is the beginning of writing, and they talk about it”* and are *“happy to just talk about books, knowing it is not necessary to be able to read the words to enjoy books together”*. [S2]

In Kirklees, the effect on parental engagement has been profound: *“In a school with 120 children in the Reception Classes, the Headteacher, before the ORIM event for parents, asked me ‘what planet do you think you are on?’ when I suggested that she should aim for 100% parental attendance. She was elated when, after running the Chatter Day on ORIM principles, 96% of the parents attended and fed back that they wanted more events like this so that they could understand (recognise) what their children’s learning looked like.”* [S4].

### Increasing Literacy Levels in Children

Ultimately, the impacts evidenced above have laid the foundations for the most fundamental - and most significant - impact of the REAL research: improving literacy development in young children. The evidence for this claim can be found in evaluations of many of the REAL follow-up projects described above. For example, through the NCB led Making it REAL Project (2009-2012) involving 680 children, several major benefits can be evidenced. At the beginning of the project 39% of children were judged to have low or extremely low levels of involvement (e.g. showing interest, concentration). The difference here is impressive with 97% observed at the end of their time on the project showing moderate, high, or extremely high levels of involvement before even entering primary school. The end of year report for the third year of the Making it REAL project identified the following impacts on children:

Percentage of children who:	Beginning of Year	End of Year
Name a favourite book	24	91
Read books often (most days)	13	73
Make meaningful marks often	8	55
Notice and talk about print around them often	0	29
Sing songs and rhymes often	10	62

In the work conducted with Oldham Council, involving training for practitioners provided directly by Nutbrown and also by the NCB drawing on the underpinning research, the programme worked *“so well for the identified children (twelve of the lowest achieving children were identified in eight schools) that the Head has funded the project for all the Nursery children”* [S2].

In summary, the ORIM framework has reached, or been used directly, by more than 5,000 practitioners and 150,000 families, and has consistently been shown to have a positive impact on early years literacy. As the ESRC Impact Prize citation notes, the research has *‘influenced local policy and national practice in parents’ role in literacy. This has made a difference to parents, by increasing their confidence and knowledge about how to help their children; practitioners, in aiding new skills in working with parents on literacy; and the children themselves.’*[S6]

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. Letter from National Children’s Bureau showing influence on NCB approach
- S2. Letter from Oldham Council used as testimonial
- S3. Booktrust letter and training provision showing use of methods and extent of use
- S4. Letter from Kirklees Council used as testimonial
- S5. Google Analytics Report for <http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk>
- S6. ESRC website [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Celebrating\\_Impact\\_print\\_tcm8-26091.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Celebrating_Impact_print_tcm8-26091.pdf)
- S7. Letter from PEEP used as evidence of scale of impact