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### Understanding shared reading practices in homes: A guide for practitioners

Based on recent research findings, this leaflet provides practitioners with information about the motivations and barriers to shared reading experienced by some families. We also cover the implications of this for practitioners wanting to support families in developing and maintaining shared reading activity in their own homes. For this study we interviewed 29 families from a variety of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. All interviews were conducted in participants' homes. The aim of the study was to understand how shared reading fitted, or did not fit, within the everyday context of families' lives. The interviews attempted to uncover the factors that both motivated and discouraged parents from reading with their children. This leaflet presents the main findings from the study.

#### Main findings from the study

1. Out of the 29 families interviewed, almost all families engaged in shared reading activity. However, families read in a whole variety of different ways. They also read at different times of day and for different purposes.
2. Some parents reported that they led and directed shared reading activity, (eg. to help their child read at school or to teach them about reading/ the world around them). However many parents stated that they read because their child wanted them to. It is important to realise that reading is a child-led activity in many homes.
3. Some parents in this study reported that they read with their children for purposes of educational endeavour, however shared reading was also seen to serve a number of other important functions in families, that were not necessarily related to literacy. This included establishing family routines, such as bedtimes, and displaying a concept of 'familyness' both within and outside the home.
4. Many parents were confident in developing their own ways of reading with their child/ren. This included deviating from the printed text, reading from the pictures, putting on voices or parents inserting their own words. It is important to note that these are good strategies for promoting children's language and literacy skills and should be encouraged.
5. Some parents reported that this (above) was not 'real' reading though and suggested that the school would be responsible for teaching 'real' reading in the future. It is important to correct this misconception.
6. Enjoyment was often cited as being critical to the maintenance of shared reading activity. Very often both parent and child had to enjoy the activity for it to be considered 'successful'.
7. Many parents reported that they needed to see positive feedback from their child if they were to maintain shared reading activity. This generally meant that they needed to see that their child was enjoying the activity, learning something from the activity, or both.
8. Perceptions of negative child-feedback often resulted in shared reading activity being reduced or stopped altogether. Many parents described 'negative' responses, including the child moving away, not sitting still, seeming distracted, or pushing books away.
9. Findings from this study suggested that a number of parents had attempted to read with their children when they were babies, but had stopped, because they feared their child was 'not ready'. Given the importance of feedback, it appears that some of these parents had stopped reading with their babies/ toddlers because they were not receiving the cues they needed from their child to indicate that the child was enjoying/ benefitting from the activity.
10. Parents who had reported negative experiences with reading themselves did still go on to develop and enjoy positive shared reading experiences with their own children. This suggests that the reading relationships that parents develop with their children, through the context of shared reading activity, are not necessarily dependent on parents having had positive experiences with reading themselves.

## Implications for practitioners

This study revealed that many parents do read with their children in their own unique ways. However, they may not see this reading as valuable, believing that 'schooled' reading, with an emphasis on decoding print and phonics, takes precedence over the ways in which shared reading takes place in the home. Of course children do need to learn how to decode print, and many parents support this in the home. However it is also important that parents develop positive reading relationships with their children and engage in regular shared reading activity in ways that suit them, their child and their own unique family context. This is particularly true in families where shared reading does not happen frequently. Practitioners can play a huge role in encouraging and supporting families in engaging in regular shared reading activity with their children. Based on the findings from this study, we recommend the following:

1. Try to engage parents in a dialogue about shared reading in the home. Take time to understand what parents already do and encourage them to continue reading in ways that are meaningful and enjoyable for them and their children. Use every opportunity to talk about reading and show them that you are genuinely interested in what they do at home.
2. Build on this by encouraging parents to develop their reading activity. Offer a selection of books for parents to read at home. Encourage parents to stay for story sessions in settings and participate if they want to. Encourage parents to talk to each other about books that they particularly enjoy reading with their children.
3. Support parents in dealing with negative feedback from their children during shared reading activity (see Guide for Parents). Help parents to recognise that all children will display negative reactions from time to time, but this does not mean that they are not 'ready' for reading or don't like it.
4. Encourage parents to allow shared reading to be child-led.
5. Encourage parents to make shared reading an enjoyable activity for themselves. Support them in finding books that they enjoy reading and tell them that they do not have to read books that they don't like. Suggest ways in which to make shared reading more enjoyable, for example using props, creating different voices for different characters, reading in different places (e.g. the bath, the garden).
6. Help parents to find ways in which to encourage their children to enjoy shared reading activity. This might include encouraging the child to choose books from the school library, making a 'den' to read in at home, encouraging the child to join in parts of the book (especially if there is repetition in the text) or encouraging siblings to read to each other.
7. Importantly, parents should be encouraged to value all of the shared reading activity that takes place in their home. They should be reminded that there is no 'right' way to read, there is no 'right' place to read, and there is no 'right' time of day to read. Parents should be encouraged to read in ways that suit them and their child and works within their own family practice.

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