

UNIVERSITY OF
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Literacy and deaf
children

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The role of parents in supporting deaf children's
literacy Dr Linda Watson

What do we know?

- Still great variability in literacy outcomes for deaf/hearing impaired pupils (e.g. Marschark)
- Some read well, but others really struggle
- Early stages are very important as difficulties seem to increase with age (e.g. Marschark and Harris)
- Cochlear implants have been very beneficial for many deaf children, but they may not be sufficient
- Deaf children can have difficulty at text level and at broader levels of comprehension (little picture and big picture)

Deaf and hearing pupils learning literacy

- Three distinct positions:
 - Deaf pupils follow the same path to literacy as hearing children
 - Deaf pupils follow a similar path to hearing children but there are (some) differences
 - Deaf pupils follow a different path from hearing children

Implications for teachers and parents

- The view that you hold of how deaf children in general or your deaf child in particular learn to read and write will influence what you think is the role of the teacher and/or parents
- It will also have implications for what you see as the role of deaf children themselves in their own literacy learning

What do deaf pupils need in order to develop good literacy skills?

- Knowledge of the language that they are going to read and write (big picture)
- Phonological awareness (knowledge of the sounds that make up words and the ability to manipulate them) (little picture)

(Meyer, Harris, Lewis)

Getting the big picture - ‘top down’ strategies

□ Relies on:

- Good (oral) language levels
 - Wide vocabulary
 - World knowledge
 - Knowledge of story structure
 - Child’s interest in literacy
- (Watson, Webster, Wood)

Fostering the big picture

- At home (as for hearing children):
 - Rich home literacy environment
 - Experiencing literacy in real life
 - Opportunities to take part (reading and writing)
 - Lots of talk
 - Valuing the child's contribution
 - Sharing books with focus on the story
(Swanwick & Watson)

Fostering the little picture

- At home when sharing books:
 - Expanding the child's contributions
 - Early letter-sound correspondences
 - Features of books/print (e.g. L → R)
 - Expecting their deaf child to be able to grasp these features

Deaf children can understand the early stages of reading and read first words like hearing children

Deaf children and early writing

- Deaf children are just as good as hearing children at the early stages of writing
 - They develop concepts about print
 - They form and test hypotheses (minimum quantity and variation of letters in a word)
 - They begin to produce text, often using letters from their name
- (Meyer, Watson)

What are parents doing to support literacy learning?

- As we live in a literate society, parents are likely to engage their children (hearing or deaf) in literacy activities
- We need to ensure that we are working with them
- Here are details of an ongoing research project into parents' literacy practices

Young Learners' Project

- A four year study of early literacy development and practices in families of four-year-olds in Victoria, Australia
- Involves, in total, data from 450 families and children and 32 teachers
- Factors include child language, cognition, play, self concept, orientation to learning, early literacy knowledge and skills; home literacy beliefs and practices; teacher beliefs and strategies, classroom environment

Young Deaf Learners' Project

- Recruited six oral early intervention centres across Australia and New Zealand
- Asked parents to complete identical survey on 'Parent views, attitudes and practices towards literacy' as parents from mainstream nurseries completed

Child participants

- All children were four at the time of data collection
- Five children had bilateral CIs, and their age of diagnosis ranged from birth to 17 months
- The remaining children wore bilateral HAs and diagnosis ranged from 4 weeks to 3 years 2 months
- English was the first language of the home
- All except two had language within the normal range

We investigated three types of literacy

- 'Traditional' literacy
- 'Environmental' literacy
- 'Techno-literacy'

'Traditional' practices

- Reading books with their child
- Singing nursery rhymes
- Telling stories
- Drawing pictures
- Writing on paper

'Environmental' practices

- Cooking together - following recipes
- Writing shopping lists
- Looking at maps
- Looking for street signs

‘Techno-literacy’ practices

- Looking at personal information on computer
- Looking at factual information on computer
- Playing literacy games on the computer
- Typing on the computer
- Creating a text message on a mobile phone
- Sending and receiving emails

Survey investigated

- Parents' own habits around literacy: traditional; environmental and techno-literacy
- Parents' type and frequency of engagement in literacy practices with their four year old
- Parents' views on how children learn to read and write and how they can help them

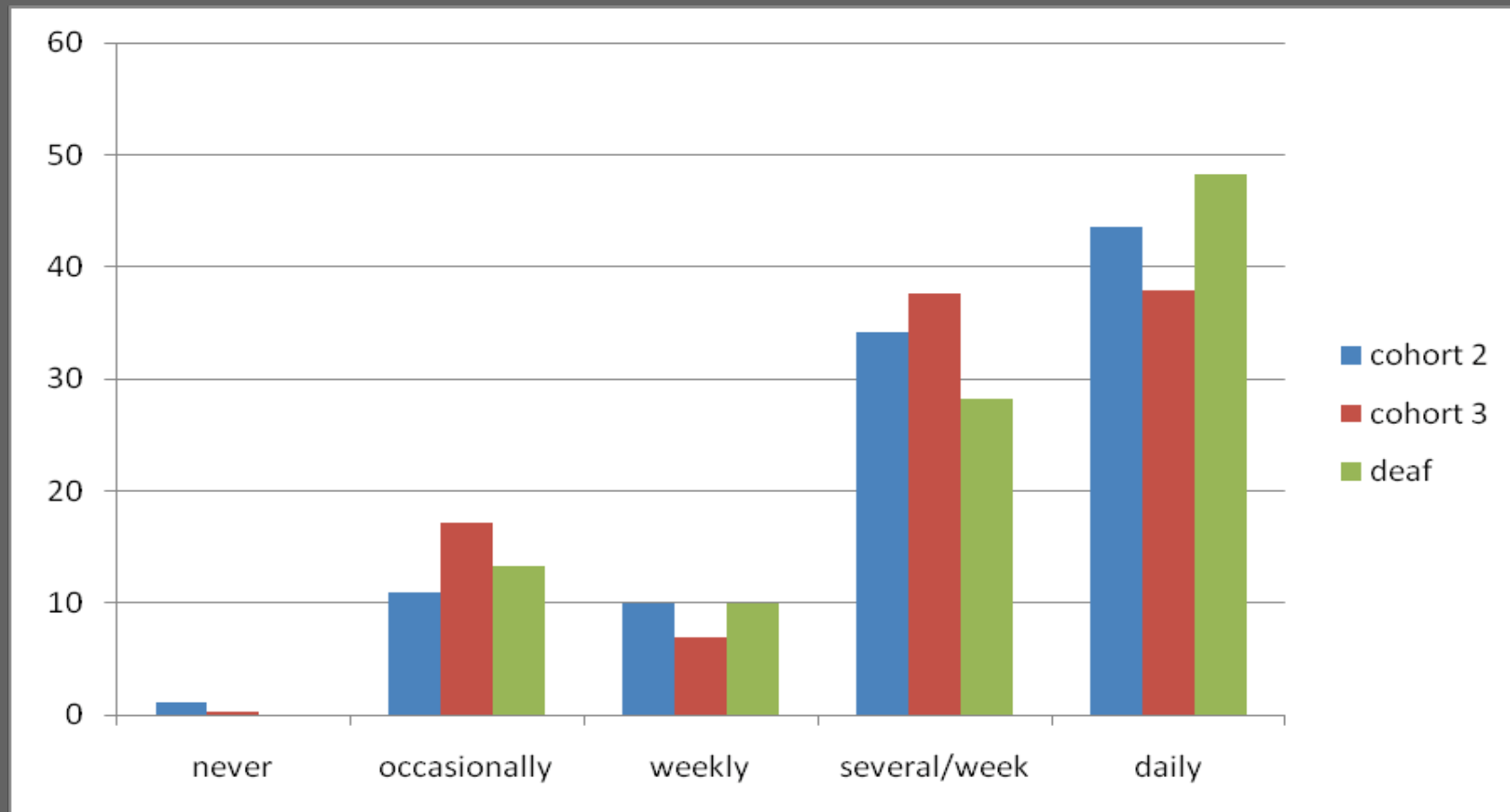
In addition, for parents of deaf children

- Collated data from files on hearing loss; device use; age at onset of deafness
- Videotaped parent sharing a familiar book and a new book with their child
- Interviewed the parent about their literacy practice with their child based on excerpts from the recordings

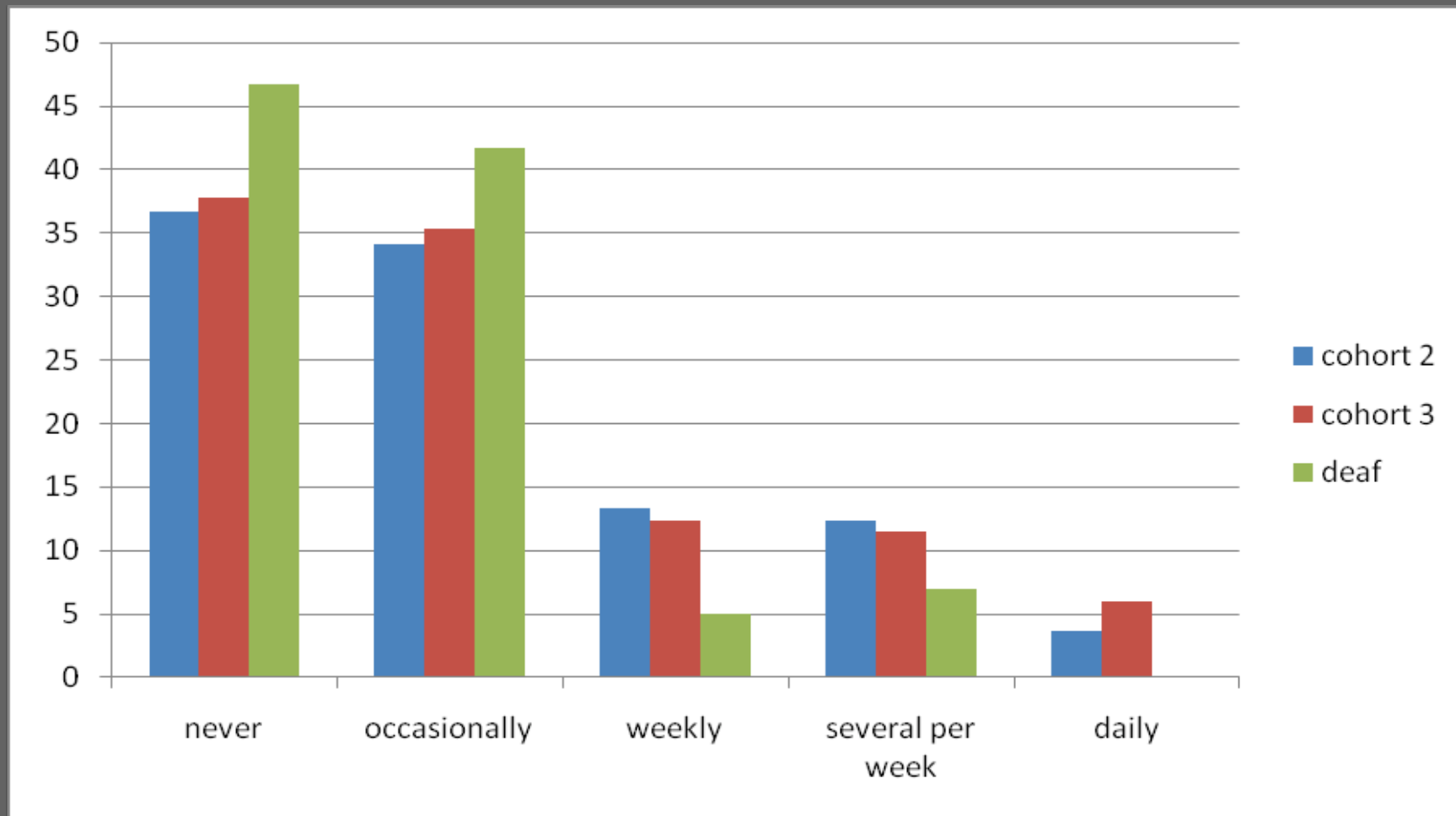
Today's presentation

- Results for deaf cohort from 1st centre (n = 12)
 - Parent practices with their deaf child and views on how children learn literacy – survey data
 - Compared these with results from parents in mainstream nurseries (cohorts 1 & 2)
 - Parent interviews based on excerpts of the video recordings

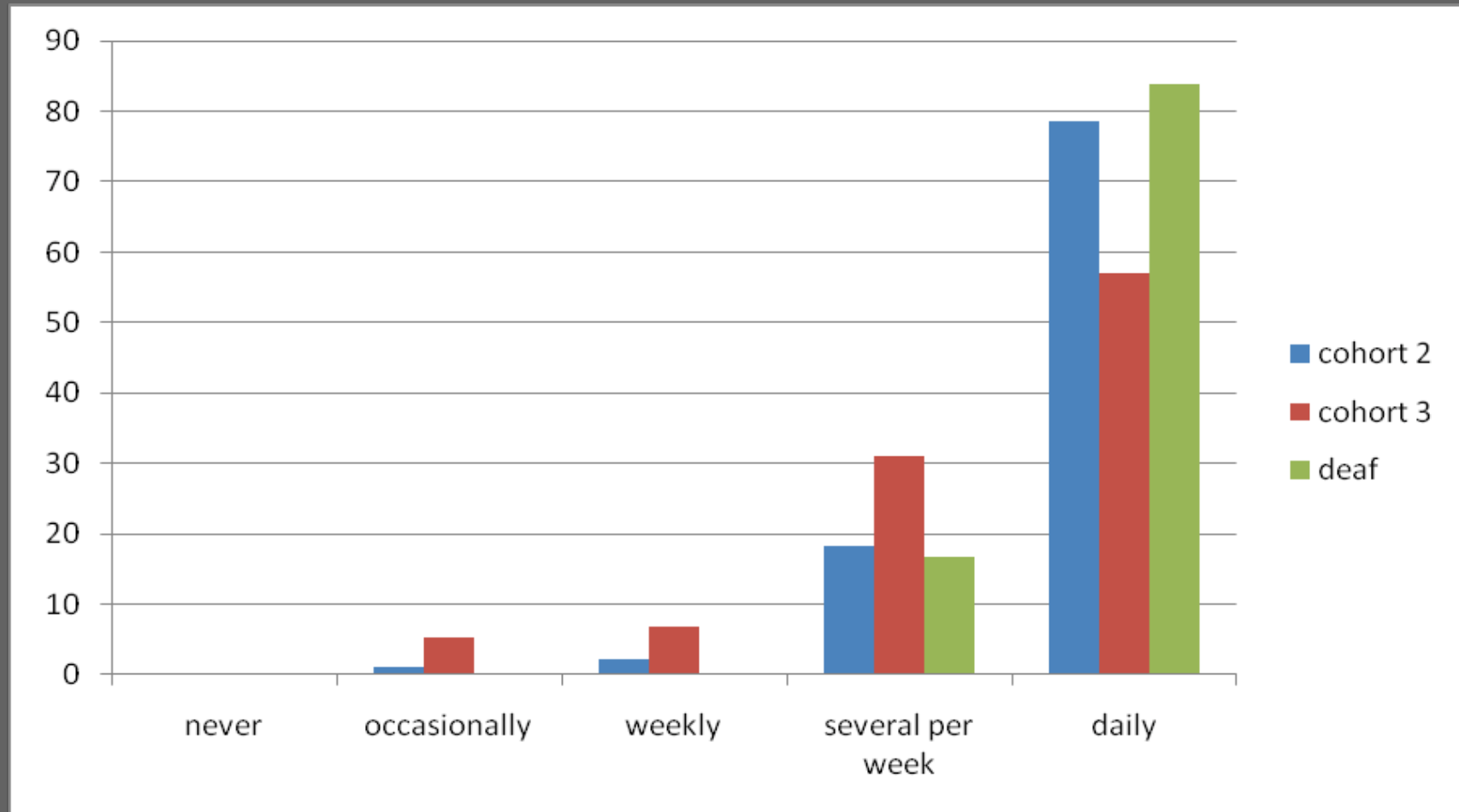
Frequency of use of traditional practices



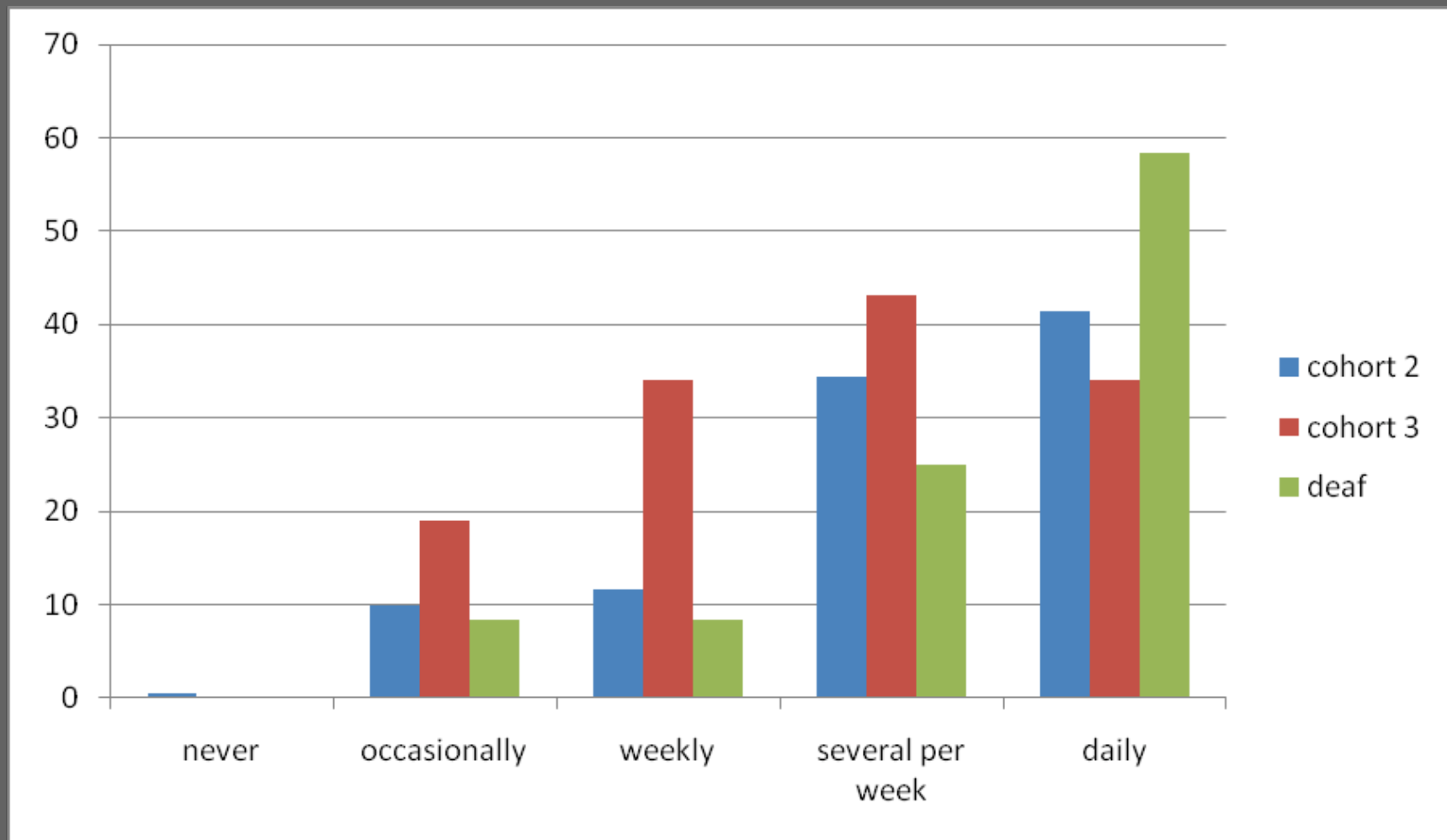
Frequency of use of techno-literacy practices



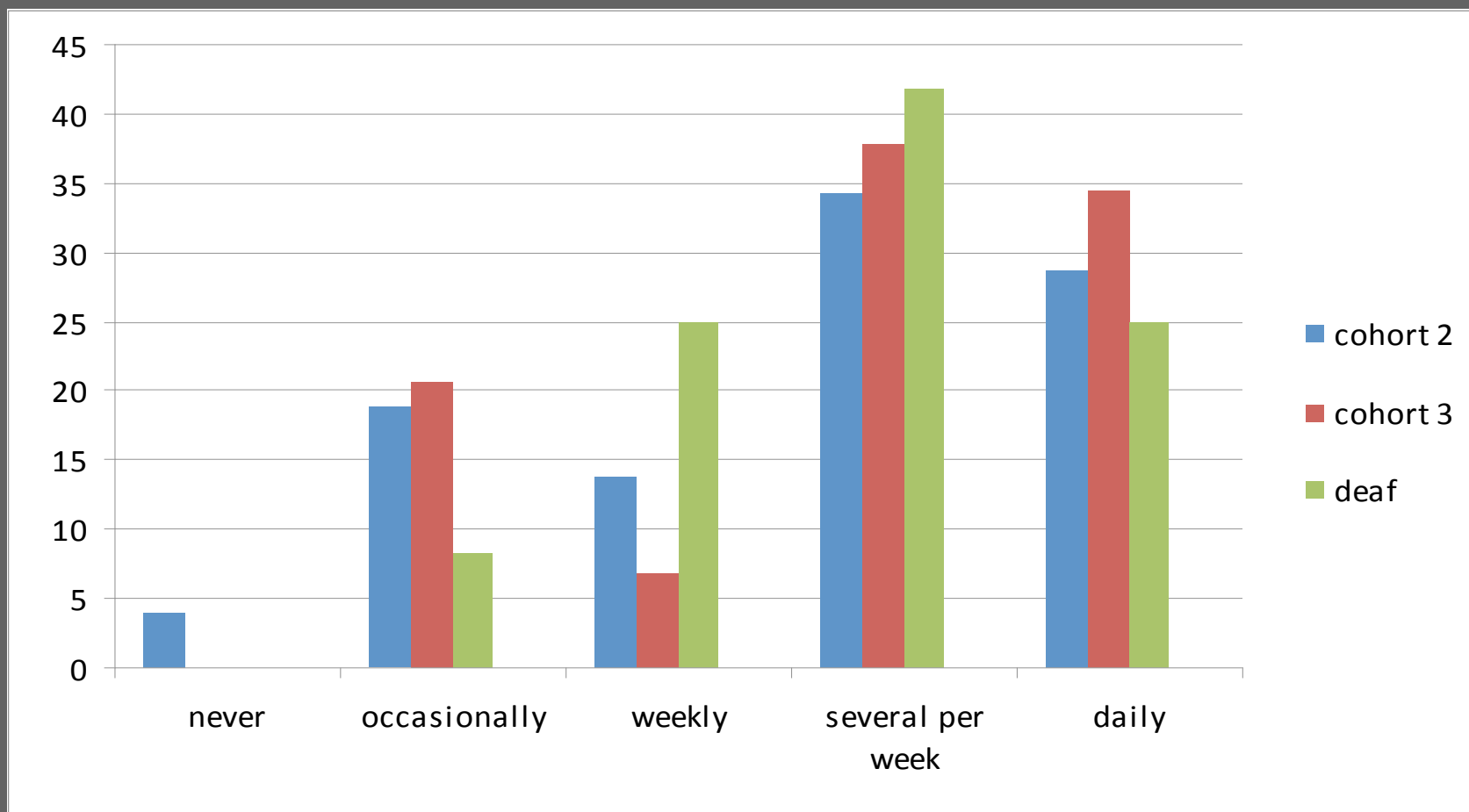
Fiction



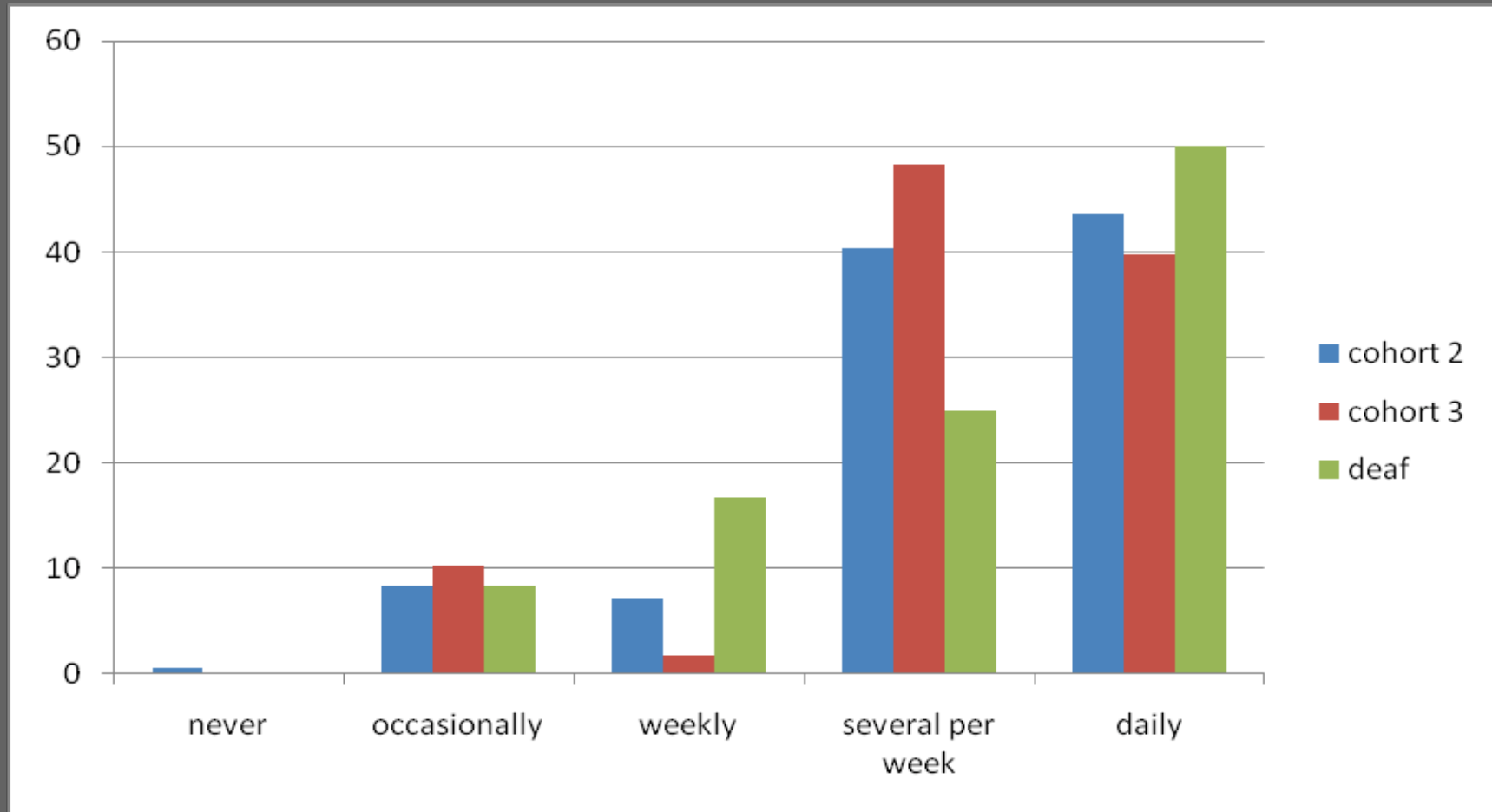
Nursery rhymes



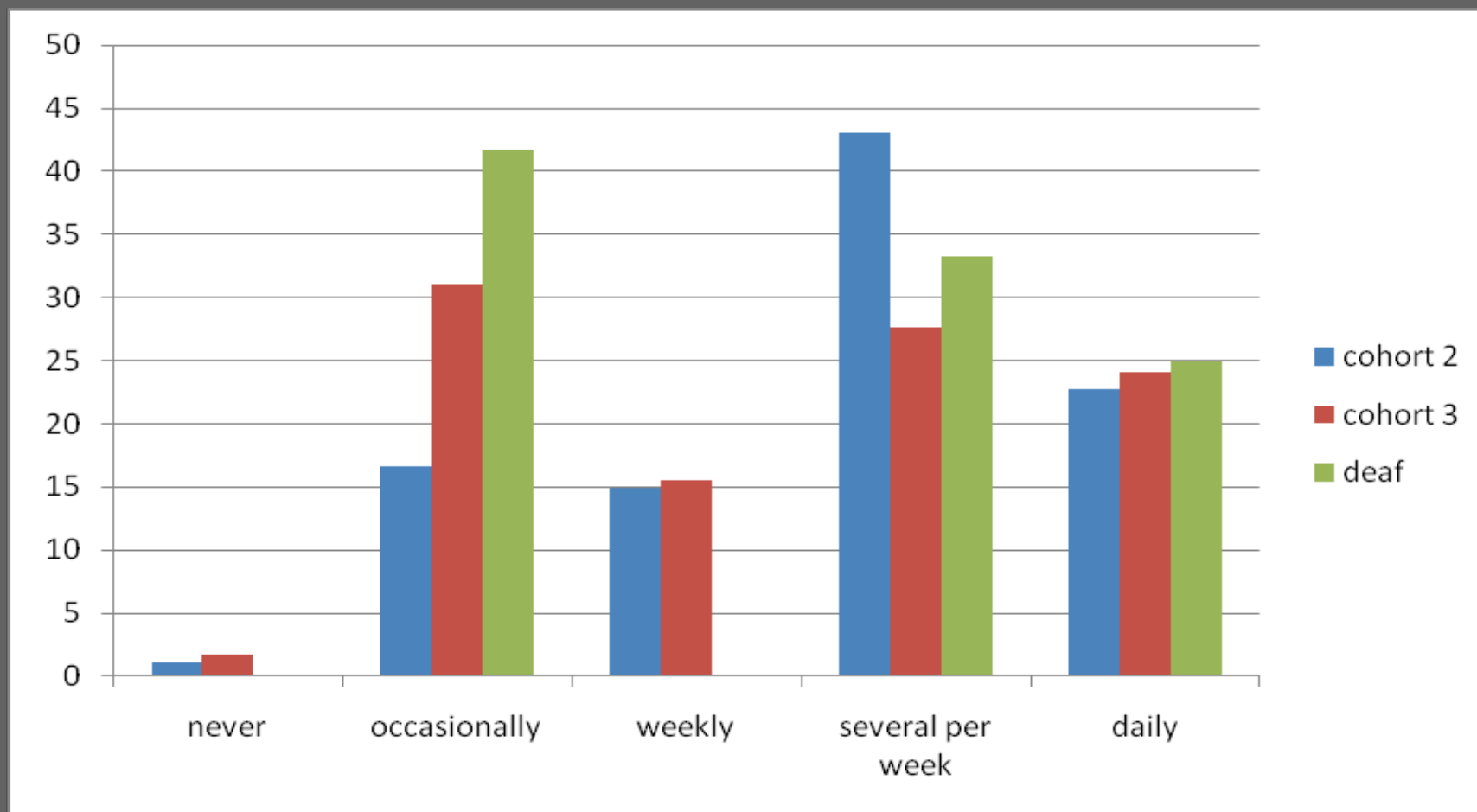
Telling stories



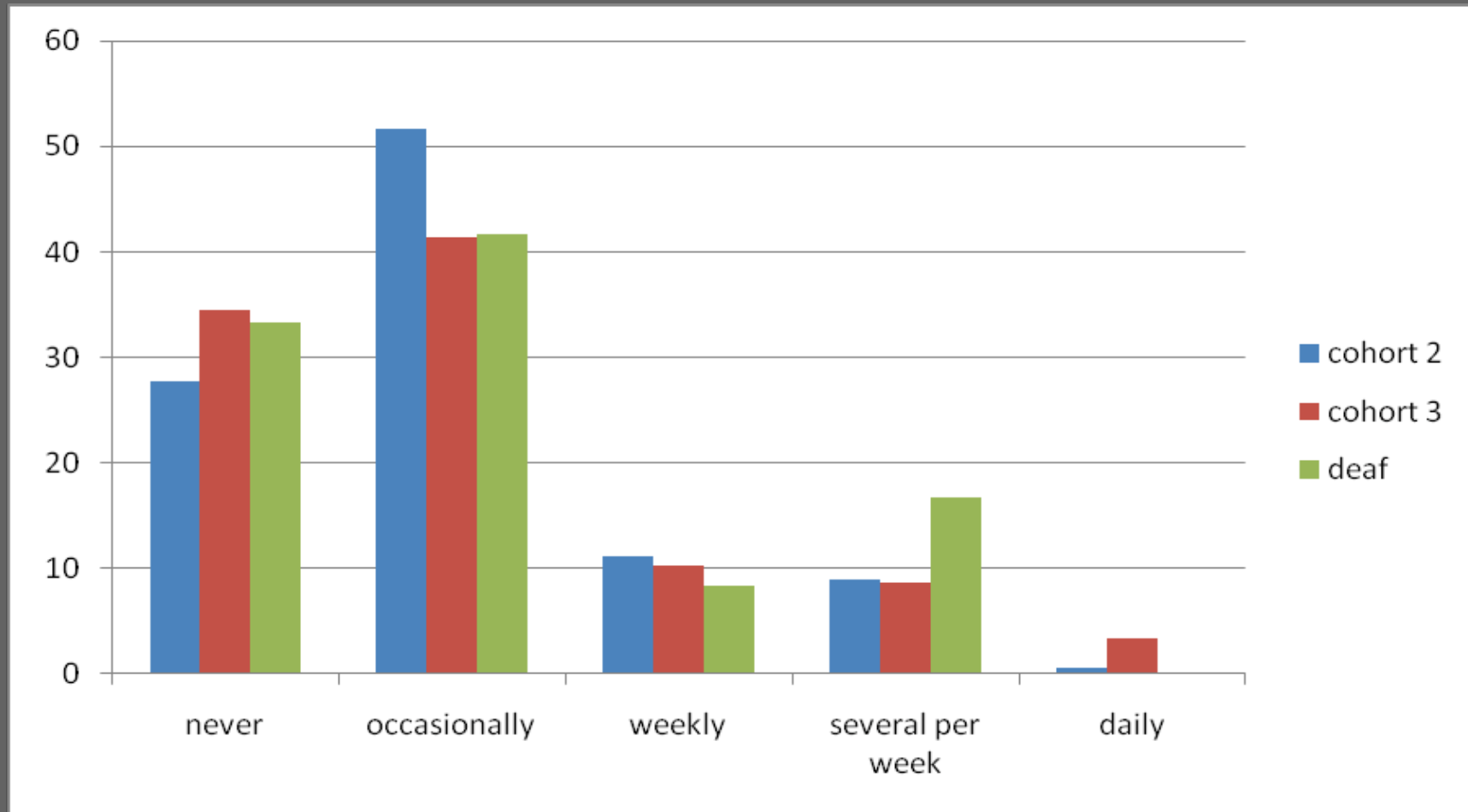
Drawing



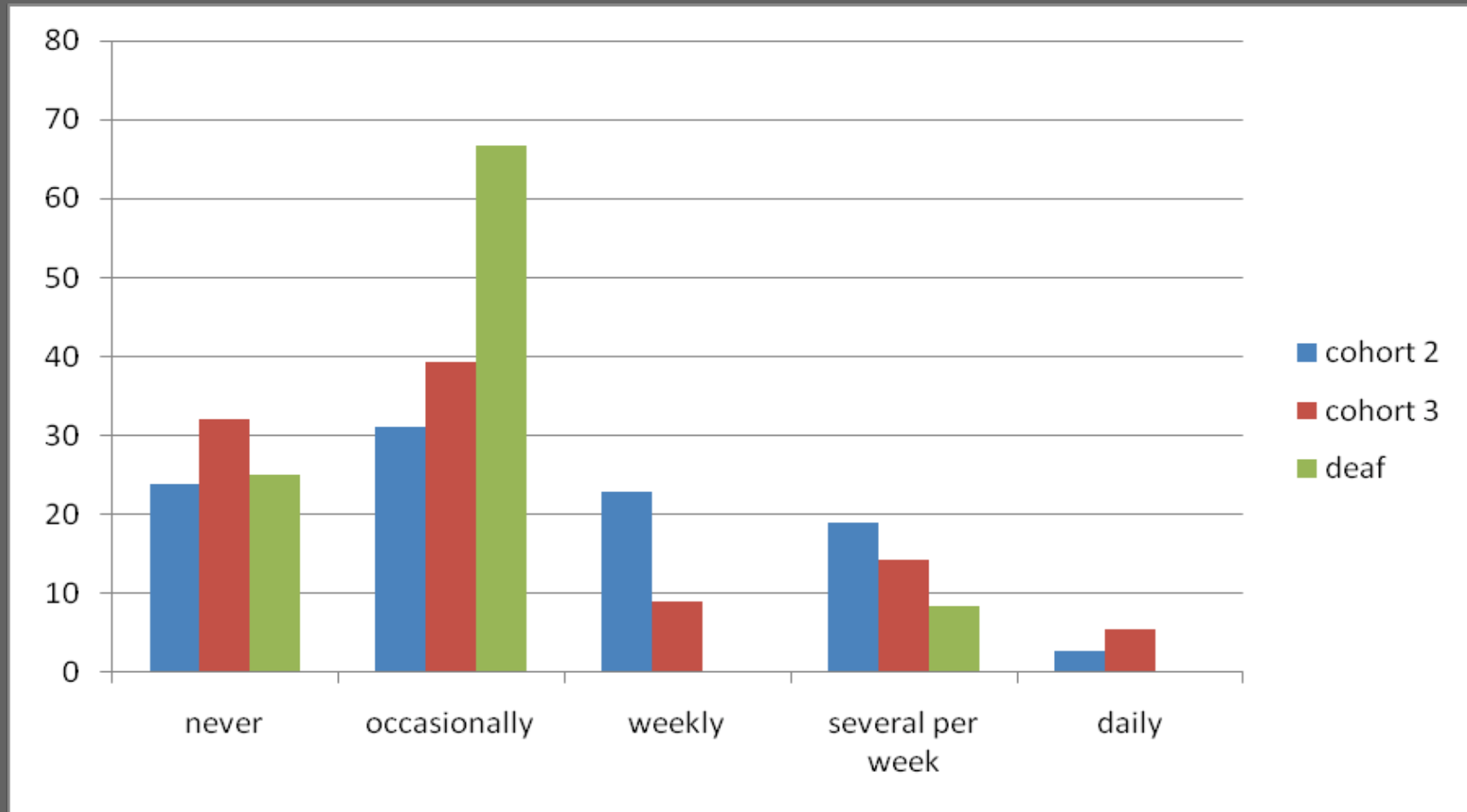
Writing



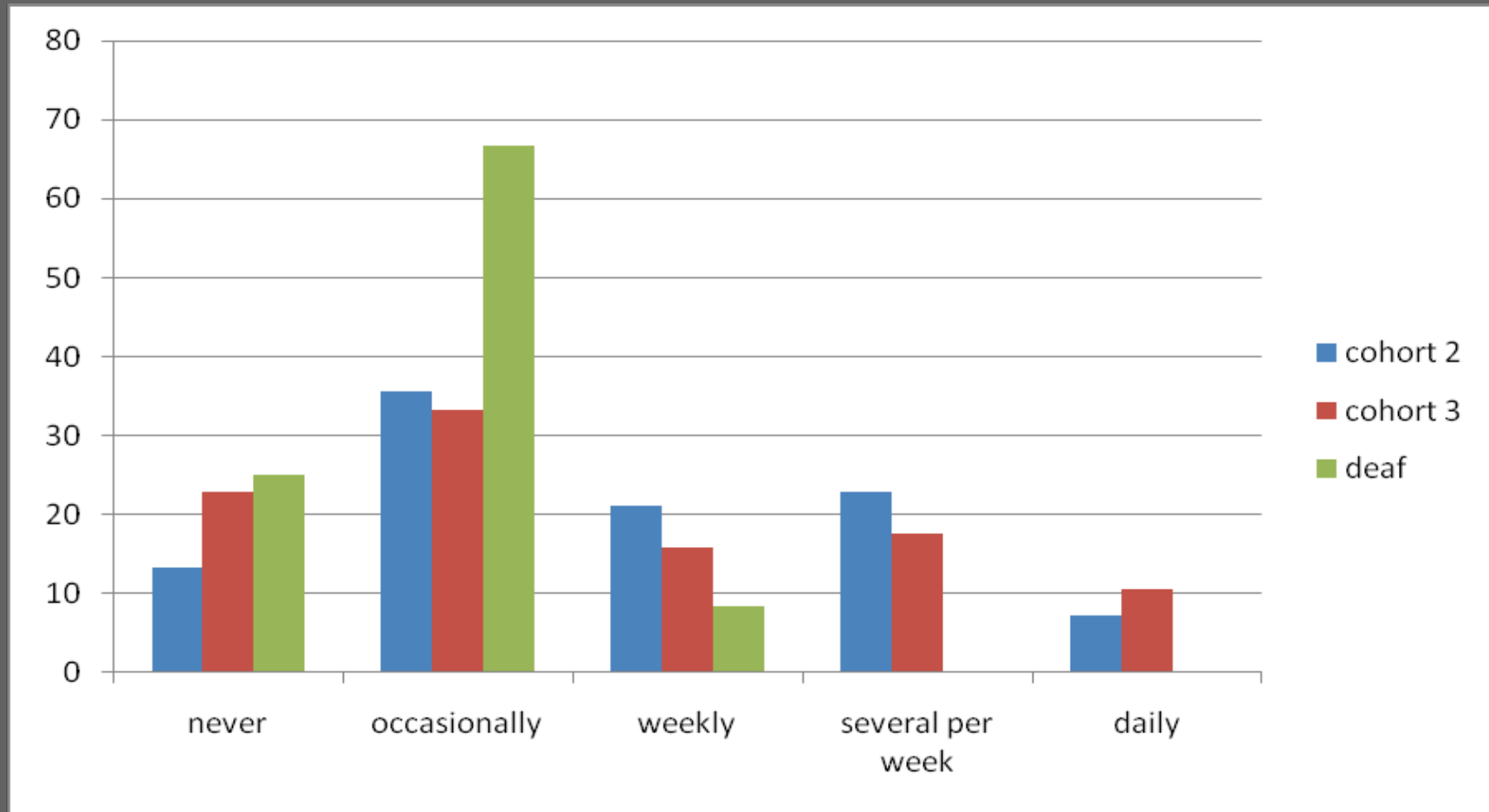
Factual information on computer



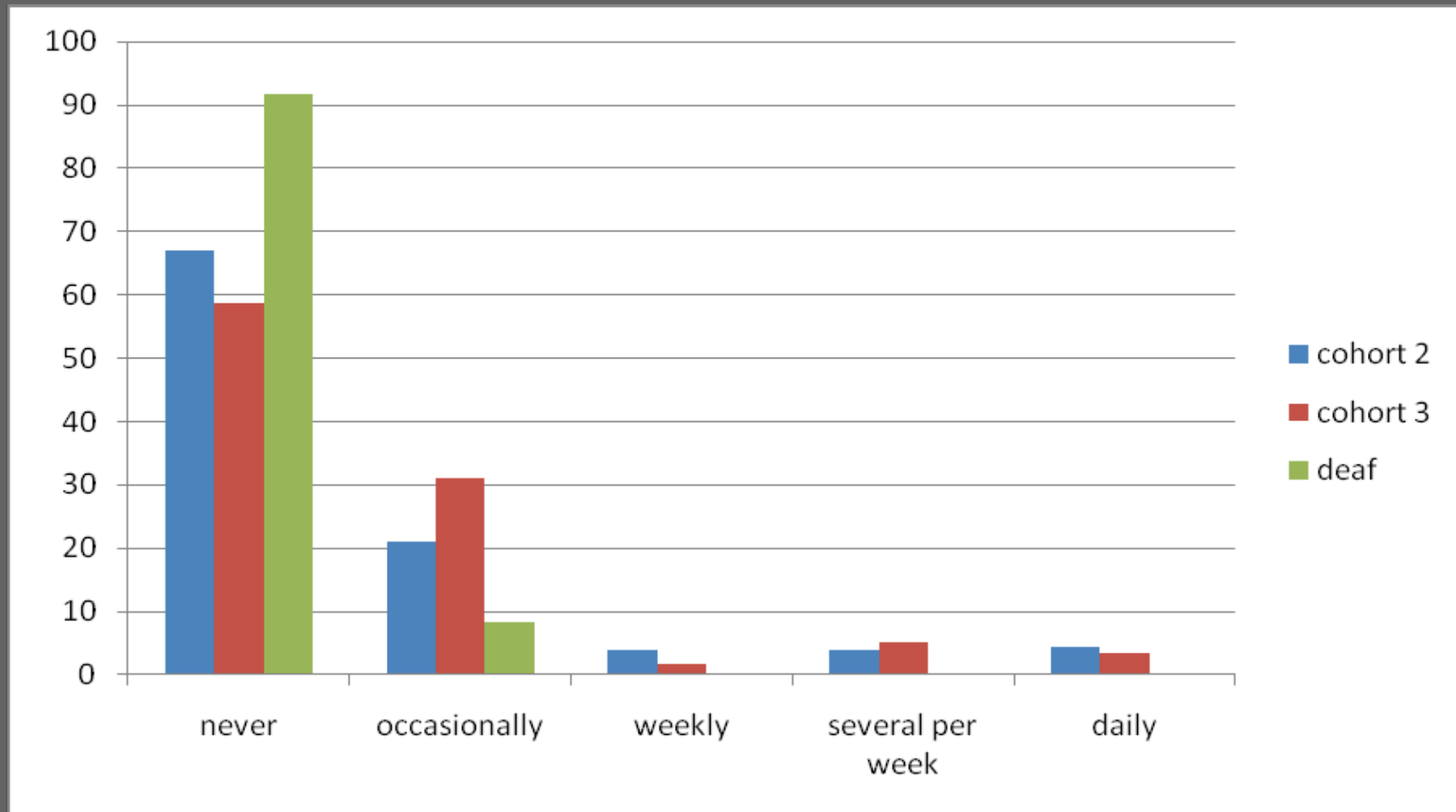
Computer literacy games



Typing on the computer



Creating a text



Interviews with parents of deaf children

- We interviewed the parents of the deaf children to probe their beliefs and practices
- We present the results for this group i.e. the same parents whose survey results were presented in the graphs

Parents' models of literacy learning

- We classified parents' responses into 3 groups: enculturation; skill enhancement; relational
- We applied the ORIM model (Hannon & Nutbrown, 1996) to each category
- **ORIM** stands for:
 - **O**pportunities
 - **R**esponding
 - **I**nteraction
 - **M**odelling

Enculturation

- The focus of literacy activity is children's enculturation into the group
 - Opportunities occur routinely and are everyday events
 - Responses from parents encourage
 - Interaction one-to-one is critical
 - Modelling by parents of literacy activities occurs incidentally

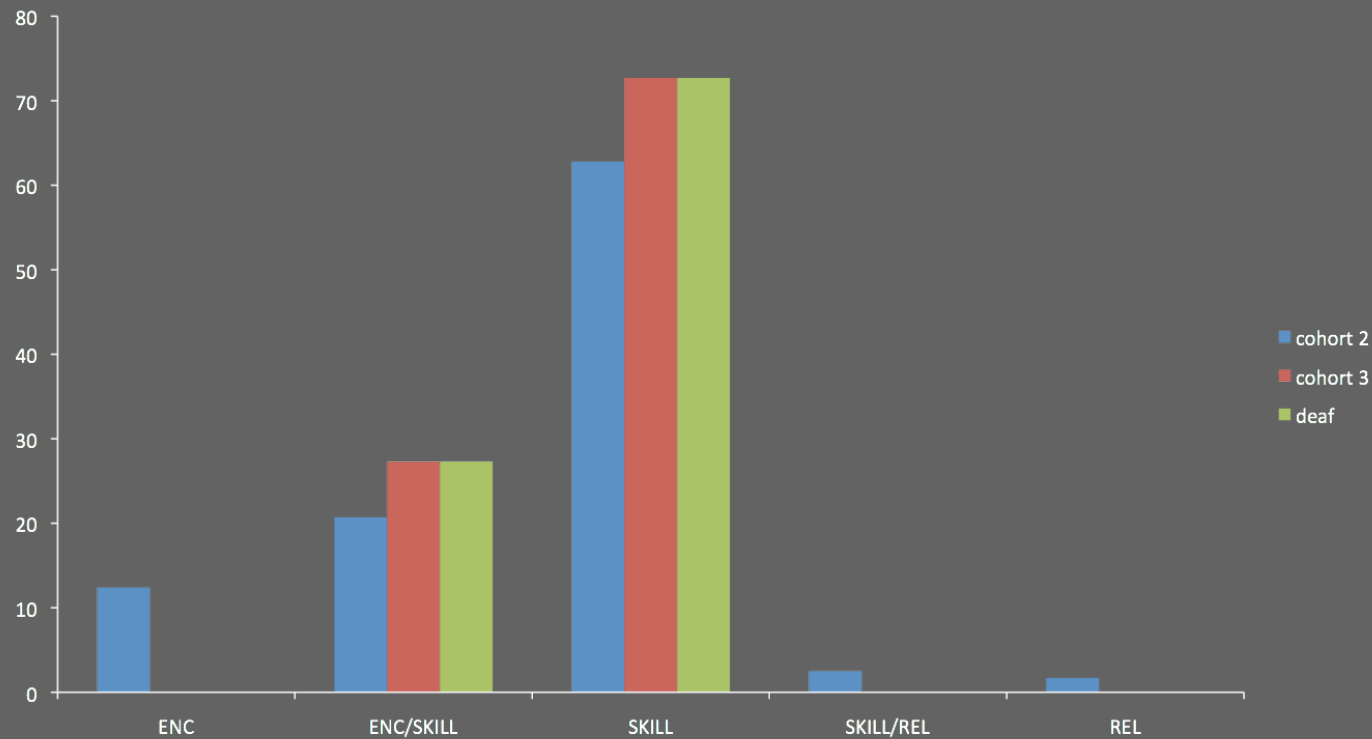
Skill enhancement

- The focus of literacy activity is to enhance children's development
 - Opportunities to learn are created, provision of resources is important
 - Responses from parents focus on showing, teaching, helping, guiding
 - Interactions are child-led or direct instruction
 - Modelling is specifically related to words or letters

Relational

- The focus of literacy activity is the relationship with the child
 - Opportunities to interact and engage with each other are created
 - Responses focus on praising, warmth
 - Interactions are seen as fun, warm (a special time of closeness)
 - Modelling of literacy occurs within fun, warm interactions

Parent models of literacy



Skill enhancement comments

- All parents mentioned this in survey and interview:
 - We write a letter and then we have to try and guess the sound
 - She wants to repeat me word for word
 - I've tried to teach him some of the letters of the alphabet
 - I trace the letter with her and say "It's an A"

Skill enhancement comments 2

- Sometimes we pick (a book) to focus on different sounds
- I write a letter and she practises it
- I always get her to do her name
- Start to talk to him about starting the letter at the top
- I'm trying to teach her some of the alphabet
- I'll write it and she will copy it

Relational comments

- Five parents mentioned this in their interview (none in the survey):
 - I think she sees it as real quality time between me and her
 - We normally snuggle up
 - It's a combination of being close as well as physical
 - We have a great time
 - Sit up and cuddles – that's probably an important part of reading for him

Language development

- We did not ask about language, but parents mentioned this in their responses:
 - (story reading) is good for her speech, for her language
 - We're trying to teach (child's name) to speak and pronounce
 - I guess the focus has been more on developing his oral language than his reading and writing – reading is a by-product of oral language

Language development 2

- I'm really happy that she's interested in books because it gives her a lot of language opportunity too
- She's learnt a lot from books, language wise
- (child's name) is learning through reading – it's just all for me flooding, flooding (child's name) with language

What advice have you had from professionals?

- Have any of (child's name) teachers talked to you about how to help (child's name) learn to read and write?
- Have any of (child's name) teachers talked to you about literacy?

Parents' responses

- Little or no advice from professionals regarding helping their child to read and write BUT they had received advice on using books to promote language:
 - Books are really important for his learning
 - If we read to (child's name) every day it will really benefit him

Conclusions from this study

- Parents of these deaf children engaged in 'traditional' literacy activities very frequently with their deaf children
- They were less likely to engage in technoliteracy
- They believed they were supporting their child's language (and speech) development through these activities

Conclusions 2

- They acknowledged being given advice on using books but they saw the purpose as to develop language rather than literacy
- There is scope for talking more about developing literacy (reading and writing)
- Encourage greater use of techno-literacy because it can be a good route in for some children (and parents)

How can we ensure our roles are complementary?

- Accept that parents of young deaf children are going to engage them in literacy activities
- Deaf and hearing parents may emphasise different aspects of literacy
- We could perhaps work alongside them more closely and support them in what they are already doing and in what interests them

What about parents of older pupils?

- Probably little point in expecting them to read a book with their older child
- But more scope in computer based activities
- Reading aloud from the computer screen is a common activity and could be helpful for an older child
- Encouraging older children to send email messages to friends and family and going through the message
- Can encourage parents to 'slip in' explanations of vocabulary etc

What about deaf children themselves?

- As adults, we read differently
- Do we expect deaf children to follow our preferred method, or a particular approach?
- Maybe young deaf children could be encouraged to explore aspects of reading and writing more themselves?
- Maybe older deaf pupils can be encouraged to develop their preferred route?

My question for the carousel

- Do we sometimes intervene too much in our attempts to help deaf children to develop their literacy?

Acknowledgments

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