Supercharge Your Storytimes

Using Intentionality, Interactivity, and Community

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Talking, reading, singing, playing, and writing—the five Every Child Ready to Read, 2nd Edition (ECRR2) practices—are important parts of a child's early literacy development. All of you who provide storytimes are using at least a few of these practices in your storytimes, but do you ever think about HOW you use them?

Project VIEWS2 (Valuable Initiatives in Early Learning that Work Successfully) was a four-year study from the University of Washington Information School made possible in part by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Project VIEWS2 initially demonstrated that storytimes make a difference in children's early literacy skills. It went on to establish that an intentional focus on early literacy skills in storytime planning and delivery increases the early literacy content of storytimes and the observable early literacy behaviors in the children who attend. Therefore when you intentionally insert early literacy skills in an interactive manner into the five practices of ECRR2, you can increase the early literacy impact of your storytime.

If you are wondering how to do this, Supercharged Storytimes can help. Supercharged Storytimes is a movement that emerged out of the VIEWS2 research. It uses the VIEWS2 Planning Tool (VPT) and emphasizes three primary methods for planning, delivering, and reflecting on your storytimes to help you be successful in your practice. These methods are intentionality, interactivity, and community.

To support the movement, the book *Supercharged Storytimes: An Early Literacy Planning and Assessment Guide* (ALA Editions, 2016) is an in-depth exploration of how to use the VPT, how to incorporate the early literacy behaviors from the VPT into the five practices of ECRR2, and how to incorporate self-reflection and peer mentoring into your process. The next sections are drawn from the book, to give you an idea of the book's content and approach, and describe how you can supercharge your own storytimes.

What Is a Supercharged Storytime?

The Supercharged Storytimes movement utilizes the VPT for planning and reflecting on early literacy storytimes. This tool is made up of two parts:

1. a collection of early literacy behaviors that a storytime provider or educator can use to incorporate early literacy into her program; and
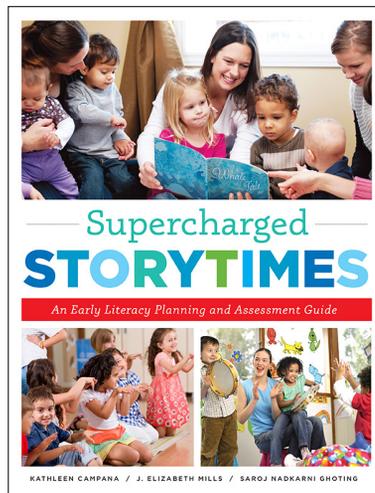
2. a related collection of early literacy behaviors that the provider or educator can observe in the children who attend the storytime.

The VPT focuses on early literacy domains (alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, communication, language use, print concepts, and writing concepts) that are similar to skills noted in ECRR1 and early learning guidelines of other states. You use the VPT by selecting behaviors from it to apply in storytime and then designing activities to incorporate your chosen behaviors.

Below are suggestions for supercharging your storytimes organized around the three primary methods.

Intentionality

Intentionality involves identifying the specific early literacy skills you want to encourage and being thoughtful about how you encourage them in storytime. An intentional focus does not stop with planning your storytime. Intentionality is a part of your storytime delivery, making sure you are deliberate in your interactions with the children and their parents/caregivers during storytime in order to best support their learning. Finally, intentionality includes regularly reflecting on your storytime to understand its impact as well as the successes and any challenges you have noticed.

When planning your storytime using the VPT, you can be intentional by

- setting aside time to plan your storytimes using the Supercharged Storytime methods;

- selecting the early literacy skills you would like to encourage;

- deciding which early literacy behaviors you would like to use; and

- designing ways to incorporate the chosen behaviors.

When delivering your storytime using the VPT, you can be intentional by

- focusing on how you are delivering the activities;

- being deliberate in your interactions with the children; and

- giving the children opportunities to participate in storytime by pausing to allow them to contribute.

When reflecting on your storytime using the VPT, you can be intentional by

- setting aside time to reflect on your storytimes;

- thinking about how your storytime went;

- considering the impact your storytimes are having on your community; and

- identifying areas you want to revise and strengthen for next time.

Interactivity

Interactivity involves incorporating storytime elements during which the child can interact with the content of the storytime. It is about having a dialogue with the children, a back-and-forth exchange around a book, a play pattern, or a flannel board story. You can incorporate interactive elements throughout all of your storytime practices. Most importantly, you want to give the children time and opportunities to respond. Interactivity fits with intentionality because it is important to be intentional about providing ways for children to interact with you as well as with the activities you deliver.

Some methods for encouraging interactivity are

- having the children act out something that is happening in the book, song, or rhyme;

- asking the children questions about the book and pausing so that they have a chance to respond; and

- asking children to repeat or fill in words in a rhyming book, song, or fingerplay.

Community

A community is made up of fellow storytime providers. Your peers can be a crucial asset to you when developing supercharged storytimes. Find a group of fellow storytime providers (or even one other storytime provider) who are just as excited as you are about taking storytimes to the next level. Meet with them regularly, face-to-face or virtually, to discuss storytime ideas and provide feedback. Working together on developing early literacy storytimes means you can share and receive activity ideas; get support, advice, or feedback; and ask questions. You can also ask a peer storytime provider to observe and assess your storytime. Then have a discussion on what was observed, providing each other with feedback and ideas.

Public library storytimes offer our youngest customers incredible opportunities to learn through play—which research tells us is the best way for children to learn. When you, as the storytime provider, are equipped with the knowledge you need to provide these deliberate learning opportunities for children, and when you intentionally apply them to your storytimes and articulate early literacy connections to the parents/caregivers, you can rest assured that your storytimes are having a positive impact on these children and making the most of your time with them. ↰

Taking Great Photos . . . And Getting Them in Print

Everyone can benefit from free publicity, right? And *Children and Libraries* (*CAL*) is pleased to serve as a venue to promote your libraries' programs and practices. In fact, we'd like to run more photos of library events in CAL, but we need the help of our readers to provide us with good, usable photos. To that end, we've prepared this guide for taking photos at your library—photos that will not only serve your library and local media but can readily be used in CAL as well.


The Camera Counts. Almost everyone now uses a digital camera or has access to one. But all digital cameras (and Smartphones) are not created equal. Generally, those with a higher megapixel count will provide the clearest images with best resolution. A digital camera of 7 megapixels or more should be able to take a photo with high enough resolution for print reproduction.

What's DPI? For photos to be reproduced in journals such as *CAL*, we require digital images of 300 DPI (dots per inch) or higher. It may be hard to tell on your camera what the end resolution will be, but here's a handy rule of thumb. Just set your camera to take photos on its highest resolution setting. That's usually the setting that will take the FEWEST photos. That's one common mistake most libraries make; they set the camera to take the MOST photos, but those are generally too small to use in print.
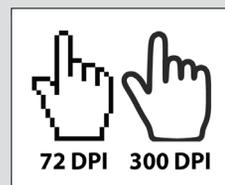
72 DPI   300 DPI

Print vs. Internet. There are different requirements for photos used in print publications and on the web. As mentioned above, a 300 dpi or higher resolution is optimal for photos used in print publications, while 72 dpi is the standard for photos used on the web. We cannot download photos from a library website unless they are high resolution (300 dpi or greater), which most likely they are not.

Composition Matters. When you're taking pictures at an event (such as storytime, book signings, etc.), keep an eye out for what would make a nice photo. Don't just snap away. Consider that a photo with two or three smiling children will make a much better photo than a group of forty kids. While it's important to take photos of the entire group to document the success of the program, snap a few close-ups of kids' faces; these will often make the biggest impact, especially in a publication, such as a newsletter, journal, or annual report. Candid shots are especially good, such as catching a child paging through a board book or building a block house.
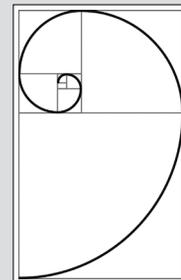
Seek out Photographers. If you're too busy the day of a library event to act as photographer, seek out someone who can and will document the event. This might be a willing parent, a library volunteer, or even a local high school or college student looking to get photography clips for her portfolio. They will likely capture things you might miss or overlook during the event.

Get Permissions. Getting permissions to take and use photographs of children is essential—both for libraries and for publications. *CAL* cannot run photos of children without having a signed permission/release form from the child's parent or legal guardian. Most libraries regularly have such release forms available during their events; if your library doesn't, you may want to consider this. It's easier to get the permissions during the event than tracking the parents down later. The release form need not be full of legalese, just a short form noting that the parent/guardian gives permission for the child's photo to be used in any publication/publicity connected to the library and its programs.
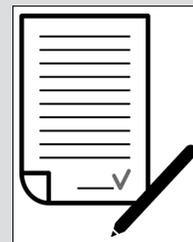
So snap away! Document those special moments at your library, and send them to us; we'd love to use them in an upcoming issue of *CAL*!

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