

Every Child Ready to Read: Best Practices

Sending the ECRR Message to Parents and Caregivers

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When it comes to implementing the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) parent education tool kit, some of the feedback our committee receives from children's librarians across the country is that it can seem overwhelming to integrate these materials into an already overstretched schedule.

Many of our colleagues serving youth have minimal program planning time while already conducting a variety of storytimes and preschool class visits. Quite simply, taking the time to consider an implementation strategy is a common barrier.

And what can be overlooked is how this tool kit will save time in the long run by providing a basic thematic structure applicable to every early childhood program. The clear, straightforward messaging of encouraging early literacy development through the five practices of **Read, Talk, Sing, Play, and Write** can be incorporated in a structured, yet flexible, method to streamline program planning and simplify messaging to adults.

When it comes to marketing, the five practices can be easily branded in free or low-cost promotional pieces, ultimately reinforcing the important role of the library as an early literacy resource, in addition to widely sharing this valuable message empowering parents and caregivers as first teachers.

Program Planning Made Easy (and Effective!)

It would be ideal to offer ongoing workshops for parents as well as day-care providers utilizing the prepared, customizable PowerPoint tool kit presentations targeting these audiences. But if that isn't possible, consider how the programs you are currently offering incorporate the five practices.

Mary Callahan, children's librarian at Queens Library, uses the five practices as the thematic basis of her Mother Goose program for babies up to seventeen months. Each of the six ses-



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sions focuses on one of the five practices with the final session as an overview of all practices. She utilizes a PowerPoint presentation on a SmartBoard (or substitute a projector) to display words to songs and rhymes to engage the adults in the program.

“At the beginning of each session, I show the slide that lists the five practices, and I explain very briefly why they are important,” she says. “Then I show a slide highlighting one of the practices, and in a sentence or two, I explain how this particular practice can help their children develop the skills that will help them to learn—and one day to read.”

Callahan says, “In the course of each session, I aim to give parents one or two more tips about incorporating the practice in their child’s daily routine. I try to convey the information in an informal and supportive way. I always point out that these are things that the parents are probably already doing and that they should be fun!”

If you haven’t tried incorporating the ECRR practices into your storytime yet, consider targeting this audience first because programming for babies tends to be more informal and flexible. It also provides the opportunity to instill enriching literacy habits right from the beginning.

Simplify Messaging

Another approach is to implement an early literacy tip in every storytime. This links one of the five practices with a research-based reason for why or how a practice supports an early literacy component. For example, here’s a phrase I use, “Singing is not only fun for young children, but helps them to break down words into smaller pieces. Hearing the smaller syllables in words will later help them sound out syllables as they learn to read.”

Published in 2013, *Storytimes for Everyone! Developing Young Children’s Language and Literacy* by Saroj Ghoting and Pamela Martin-Díaz offers further guidance on the art of early literacy asides. Related free resources are available on the “Storytime Share” section of Ghoting’s website.

In addition to sharing this information in storytime, consider an area in your library to display an early literacy tip along with associated books. For the practice above, display sing-aloud books such as *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* by Eileen Christelow, *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen, *Jazz Baby* by Lisa Wheeler, Pete the Cat titles by Eric Litwin, or Mother Goose collections. For more ideas, check out the Colorado Libraries for Early Literacy Bell Picture Book Awards, which provide annual recognition of high quality picturebooks that support early literacy development.

For More Information

Here are links to some of the sites mentioned in this article.

- **Saroj Ghoting Storytime Share**, www.earlylit.net/storytime-share/?page_id=6
- **Colorado Libraries for Early Literacy Bell Picture Book Awards**, www.clel.org/content/bell-awards
- **ALA Store: Every Child Ready to Read @ your library Toolkit for Spanish-Speaking Communities**, www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=10927

Branding Library Material

This is the first year our library is offering a summer reading log specifically for ages birth to five. (For more ideas on how to do so, refer to the ECRR column, in the summer 2014 issue of *Children and Libraries*, by Michelle Willis.) In addition to emphasizing time spent reading, our log suggests easy ways to implement every practice.

The most exciting (and inexpensive!) incentive we found are stickers. Designed in-house with the library’s logo, each highlights one of the five practices using text and an associated image. Even the small act of passing out a sticker is another opportunity to reiterate the value of these practices. Although the target audience is truly the parent, we anticipate young children will enjoy the colorful images, and they will be a conversation starter all around.

Consider Your Audience

There is much variety among the sixty-two libraries within Queens, let alone the entire country! Given your unique knowledge of your community, strategize what component will be the most effective and practical to implement first. This gives you the flexibility to learn as you go and adjust as needed.

In our incredibly diverse and multilingual borough, Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language. That’s why our summer reading log for ages birth to five is printed in both Spanish and English.

And the ECRR tool kit in Spanish just became available as a digital download. Now it is much easier to share with a wider audience of parents and caregivers the five practices of “*Lea, Habla, Canta, Juega, y Escribe*” to support the development of early literacy skills in young children. 📖