

Expanding Early Literacy Services

A Quick Bibliography of Resources

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Public service to families with small children has long been a traditional and respected role of public libraries. Storytimes for preschool children and collections of books for that age level have been mainstays in public library youth services since the 1940s.

However, in recent years, public libraries have moved beyond their role as resource providers, becoming, in addition, centers for early literacy education. Public libraries now provide intentionally focused storytime experiences, physical space and activities that support early literacy development, educational programming and interactions for adult caregivers, and outreach programming for high-needs families to ensure school readiness for young children.

This recommended, but not all-inclusive, bibliography explores the various ways public libraries actively support early literacy development, moving public service to this population group beyond traditional storytimes and material collections.

Association for Library Service to Children and Public Library Association. *Every Child Ready to Read, 2nd ed.* Chicago: ALA Editions, 2011.

This cooperative publication from ALSC and PLA provides background information, reproducible training workshops, and supplemental resources to support the American Library Association's Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) initiative. This initiative, a result of research such as the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress, responded to a need to increase kindergarten readiness, particularly early literacy. It moved public libraries' early literacy programming from being child-centered to focusing on parent and caregiver education.

In 2004, ALSC and PLA published the first manual for implementing the initiative, but since then, that manual has been revised and updated.

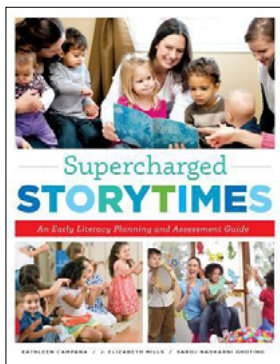
While the first edition of the ECRR manual focused on programming to develop six early literacy skills, the second edition focuses on programming to experience five early literacy practices—talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing. The ECRR2 manual explains that research demonstrated that these five practices are more natural and comprehensible for adult caregivers.

The manual provides a valuable resource for libraries implementing or updating their early literacy programming, particularly for those libraries targeting education of adult caregivers. While the first section summarizes ECRR, ensuing sections provide scripted workshops, explaining the five early literacy practices. These latter sections are designed for delivery to parents and caregivers with or without children present, to library staff, and to community partners. Finally, the last section provides lists of early literacy milestones, booklists to supplement the five practices, and reproducible evaluation forms.



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Campana, Kathleen, J. Elizabeth Mills, and Saroj Ghoting. *Supercharged Storytimes: An Early Literacy Planning and Assessment Guide*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2016.



Even as libraries incorporate early literacy theory into space allocation, patron interaction, and outreach activities, preschool storytimes retain their importance as the foundation of early literacy programming. The authors of this guide advocate planning those storytimes so that children receive the maximum early literacy exposure possible during their library experience. According to

the authors, preschool storytimes can and should incorporate early literacy behaviors, both in the presenter's actions and in the children's responses.

Specifically, the authors advocate incorporation of the six early literacy skills presented in the first edition of the ECRR manual, although their recommended practices apply the five early literacy skills presented in ECRR2.

The authors advocate using intentionality, interactivity, and community to focus on these early literacy behaviors, thus enhancing traditional preschool storytimes. Intentionality involves careful planning of storytimes to maximize the early literacy experience, as well as being deliberate in the presentation of the activities prepared and in the educational comments directed at the adult caregivers in the audience. Interactivity involves using activities that encourage child participation. Community refers to collaborating with other storytime planners to both share and receive ideas.

While their guide offers many ideas for incorporating specific early literacy skills into storytime presentations, the authors advocate that children learn best through play. According to the authors, the best storytime sessions are intentionally planned so that children can playfully engage in a variety of activities and librarians can articulate early literacy connections to adult caregivers.

Dickerson, Constance. "The Preschool Literacy and You (PLAY) Room." *Children & Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children* 10, no. 1 (2012): 11–15.

Funding from a Museum and Library Services grant allowed a branch of the Cleveland Heights (OH) Public Library System to renovate a separate room of their children's department to create a space entirely devoted to early literacy learning activities. Dickerson's article describes the various activities incorporated in the development of the Preschool Literacy and You (PLAY) Room and details the planning and decision-making process of the librarians designing the space.

Important elements included props and activities that encourage imaginative play; a baby-safe station geared toward pre-walkers; installations of free-standing early literacy stations; age-appropriate technology and computer stations; durable, child-friendly furniture; and flexible room dividers to allow for larger programs. In addition, librarian-created games and interactive activities highlight the five early literacy skill builders. Librarians have also created many hint sheets to help adult caregivers use the various early literacy stations as well as incorporate early literacy activities at home.

Dickerson presents a list of the items purchased for the PLAY room, along with vendor contact information, in a sidebar to the article. She then provides many ideas for low-cost alternatives to some of the more expensive elements, making this article a valuable resource for any library attempting to enhance its early literacy on-site activities.

Feinberg, Sandra and James R. Keller. "Designing Space for Children and Teens in Libraries and Public Places." *American Libraries* 41, no. 11–12 (2010): 34–37.

To establish early literacy programming, a library must have adequate space to accommodate materials, storytimes, and interactive learning activities. The authors walk through the process of designing a library space for children or teens; although the age groups differ, the process of design is the same. For this bibliography, the focus will be on the parts of the article that address library space for preschool children.

The authors recommend beginning with a community assessment to establish the number of young families with children. It should include methods of determining information about library accessibility and utilization. Input from potential users can help librarians determine how the library space should look and function.

Additional recommendations for designing a library space to promote early literacy include visiting other libraries (either in person or online) to gather ideas of what does and does not work, perusing catalogs to determine what products are feasible, and looking at architectural plans to assess how space can be allocated for early literacy and other services. The authors strongly recommend that librarians who serve children be included in planning meetings. The authors' recommendations about planning a children's department that can accommodate early literacy programming are valuable for any library considering new construction or renovation projects.

Foote, Anna. "Helping Children Learn the Six Skills, and Helping Adults Help Children." In *Six Skills by Age Six*. Denver: Libraries Unlimited, 2015.

Foote explores how libraries can help children achieve the six early literacy skills needed to ensure kindergarten readiness. The entire book provides expert advice for the development of an early literacy program at a public library, relying on the writing of early literacy consultant Saroj Ghoting. However,

chapter three is of particular relevance, as it explores the ways librarians can utilize preschool storytimes, the library's physical space, and librarian-parent interactions to help develop early literacy skills.

Regarding physical space, Foote offers advice for large, medium, and small libraries. Suggestions range from weeding the collection to free shelf space that can be used to house small bins of blocks, crayons, and manipulatives to installing interactive early literacy stations that encourage free play within the library setting. Foote explores the concept of free play extensively, defining different types of play and suggesting ways for libraries to use physical objects to encourage each type. Suggestions again range from those that are inexpensive and easy to incorporate into existing space to those that require a larger investment of money and space.

Steins, Jenny, and Valerie Kimble. "Growing Like a Read: Tailoring an Early Literacy Program for your Community." *Texas Library Journal* 90, no. 2 (2014): 66–69.

Librarians at central Oklahoma's Pioneer Library System recognized that although their library preschool storytimes provided early literacy skill-building activities, these isolated sessions did not provide the routine and repetition truly needed to foster brain development in preschool children. Therefore they developed a program to assist parents and adult caregivers in incorporating early literacy skills into the daily and hourly routines of their children.

The article focuses on the development of the program, called Growing Like a Read, or GLAR. The foundation of the program included the ECRR manual, as well as input from local experts. These sources were used to develop sets of age-appropriate activities targeted at children from birth to age four; the sets of activities change at six-month intervals during this period. The article describes the adult education efforts, community partnerships, program incentives, grant applications, and staff training that were involved in the launch of GLAR.

Once the program was developed, librarians distributed the materials to adult caregivers who signed up at preschool storytimes. The librarians then focused their efforts on outreach services. The authors go on to document the use of the library website, efforts to reach underserved populations, and goals for further outreach that were part of the second stage of GLAR.

Stoltz, Dorothy, Marisa Connor, and James Bradberry. *The Power of Play: Designing Early Learning Spaces*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2015.

In this guide, the authors focus on the best practices in play-and-learn destination design. Content includes a summary of the research supporting the importance of play in child development, a review of



the best models of play-and-learn spaces in children's institutions, a guide to designing a play-and-learn space, and an appendix of useful resources and tips.

In the section "Mindful Planning and Creative Design," the authors not only provide a step-by-step plan for designing a play-and-learn space, but also offer chapters about pre-planning assessments; universal design considerations; design for small, medium, and large libraries; advocacy in the community; and activity planning, including instructions for adult caregivers, in the play-and-learn center.

The sample materials included in the book, including reproducible staff and community surveys, add to the value of this resource for public libraries considering a play-and-learn center. Although a separate center may not be feasible for many libraries, this well-organized guide helps libraries of any budget incorporate more early literacy activities into their existing library space.

Stoltz, Dorothy. "A Smorgasbord of Possibilities." *Children & Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children* 12, no. 2 (2014): 21–25.

Stoltz reports on collaborative efforts by the Maryland Department of Education, the Maryland Ready at Five initiative, and Maryland libraries to increase kindergarten readiness among Maryland preschoolers. The first part of the collaboration focused on training public librarians about childhood brain development so that librarians would then, through daily interactions, train other librarians and adult caregivers with this information. These efforts led to a research project that demonstrated a correlation between adult training in childhood brain development and kindergarten readiness, underscoring the importance of librarians' role as early literacy experts and the importance of relationship-building between libraries and families.

Maryland libraries then capitalized on these relationships in their efforts to help high-needs families. The state's Early Childhood Learning Council applied for Early Learning Grants from the US Department of Education, targeting in their grant proposal the development of library family councils at ten public libraries serving high-needs populations. These library family councils offered educational programming about early literacy development, home environment, and lifelong learning. In addition, the ten libraries established community resource kiosks within their children's library spaces to provide information about social services to families. With appropriate training, librarians serving these high-needs populations were able to offer referrals to these social service agencies.

In these ways, Maryland public libraries offer quality programming to support all families while targeting additional resources to support high-needs families. This multiyear, multilayered effort demonstrates the role of public libraries in partnering with education and social service agencies to promote early literacy education. ↻