Building Bridges to Early Childhood Educators

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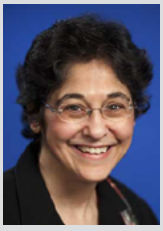

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The more we librarians can be a part of [our partners'] world, the more our partners help us shape library services to be responsive to the community," says Mary Hastler, CEO of Harford County (MD) Public Library.

More than twelve years after its inception, the Every Child Ready to Read @ your library initiative (ECRR) continues to expand in response to our needs. To help library staff strengthen and deepen our connections with our community partners, the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children have enhanced the content in a new downloadable toolkit (https://www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=11997) targeting early childhood educators.

Developed as a parent-education initiative in 2004, the original toolkit offered library staff workshops and resources to reach parents and families to help their children (newborn to age five) enter school ready to learn to read. It has since been used to train staff, boost early literacy in a variety of programs, enhance library environments, and work with partners.

The second edition of ECRR, released in 2011, updated the early literacy research and structure and responded to feedback from library staff and workshop participants. By leading with the five practices—talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing—to develop early literacy skills throughout the day, the early literacy information became more easily understandable.

The workshops thus far have provided content and used wording directed at parents and caregivers. The term "caregivers" is used to include grandparents, foster parents, and others who may be the primary caregiver of the child. The context for activities, the wording in the slides and notes pages of the slideshow presentations, and the photos in the presentations have been in a home setting and one-on-one with a child.

As we learned more about early literacy and partnered with early childhood agencies and organizations, we found yet another opportunity—to offer trainings to childcare providers, Head Start staff, home-visiting staff, and other early childhood educators. Early childhood educators share common goals with public libraries—school readiness and supporting the family to help children be ready to learn in school. The development of the ECRR Toolkit for Serving Early Childhood Educators (ELE ECRR Toolkit) is in response to these shared outcomes.

This new digital toolkit for training early childhood educators is primarily aimed at public library staff as a how-to manual to train family childcare providers, childcare-center staff, Head Start teachers, preschool teachers, home-visiting staff, and others in early childhood education. Meeting the needs and requirements of these partners is challenging because of different training requirements across states and agencies. However, it is also an exciting opportunity to support our early childhood partners and the families we serve in yet another vital way.

The ECE ECRR Toolkit provides the structure and information to make it easier for you to plan trainings as you become familiar with the requirements for your state and federal Head Start early literacy standards.

How does this toolkit differ from the ECRR2 manual and workshops aimed at parents?

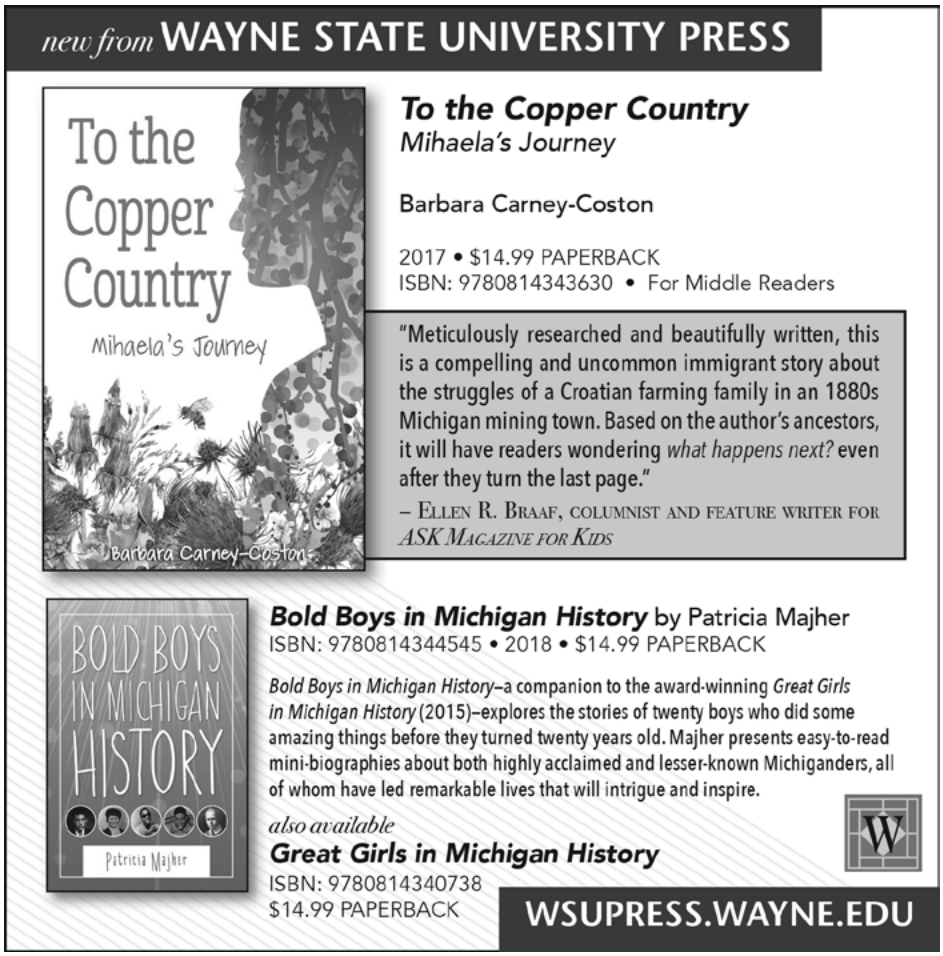
Because early childhood educators' trainings require more rigor around early literacy skills, the ECE ECRR Toolkit workshop slideshow presentations are structured around these skills. The basic workshop looks at oral language (listening skills, speaking skills, and communication skills) as a basis for all later literacy and then addresses the early literacy skills that lead to later reading. Phonological awareness, print awareness/conventions, and letter knowledge most directly support the reading skill of decoding while vocabulary and background knowledge most directly support comprehension. The suggested activities around the five practices focus on the childcare setting. The toolkit also provides you with both a pre- and post-assessment survey, which is often needed by the training agency.

Many of us who have trained early childhood educators have found that they often think of early literacy specifically in terms of sharing books with children, such as at circle time or storytime. Some of the suggested hands-on activities help early childhood educators become more intentional about early literacy around routines and activities, expanding their thinking by discussing ways to support early literacy development as we talk, sing, read, write, and play with children throughout their day.

The digital ECE ECRR Toolkit includes the following:

- planning guides
- basic workshop—slides and content in notes pages
- supplemental slides and content in notes pages
- icebreakers to use in the training
- handouts to use during the training, including a booklist and activities for each skill
- links to videos that can supplement your presentation that are based in a group setting rather than one-on-one with a child
- participant pre- and post-assessment surveys
- training evaluation form
- resources specifically aimed at working with early childhood educators

All the slides are customizable—you can add and delete slides as well as change the text and notes in the slide presentations.

The ECE ECRR Toolkit is designed to be more than a timesaver for those who were adapting the ECRR2 Manual workshops for early childhood educators. In using the Toolkit content and going through the planning process, library staff deepen our own understanding of early literacy and our ability to interpret what we do and what we offer in ways that boost our value to early childhood educators.

In addition, this Toolkit can catapult us to yet a higher level in our early childhood communities as we all work together toward our common goals of helping all children enter school ready to read, ready to learn, and to be enthusiastic about both.