

Moving from ECRR to ECRS

Getting Every Child Ready for School

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Have you ever wondered how well your storytimes and other programs are preparing children for school by providing the skills they need to enter school ready to learn? You are probably using the five practices from Every Child Ready to Read 2 (ECRR)—talking, singing, reading, playing, and writing—to support children's literacy learning, but are you using them to support other types of learning?

While researchers have yet to agree on what constitutes school readiness, work is being done to understand what knowledge and skills can best help children to be ready to learn in the formal education environment. In a review of literature related to school readiness, the following knowledge and skills were identified as important for school readiness:¹

1. Emergent math skills—strong predictor
2. Attention skills—predictor
3. Early literacy skills—predictor
4. Fine motor skills—predictor
5. Internalizing and externalizing behavior—uncertain predictor
6. Social skills—uncertain predictor

Research has demonstrated that storytimes are encouraging the acquisition of some of these types of knowledge and skills for young children.² VIEWS2, a study of early literacy in public library storytimes, found a strong correlation between the early literacy content of the storytime and the children's early literacy behaviors. In addition, after storytime providers were trained and encouraged to be intentional and interactive with their storytime delivery, the research found an increase in the early literacy content and in the children's early literacy behaviors that occurred after their storytimes.³ A more recent study found that storytimes are incorporating a variety of concepts across the knowledge areas and skills, identified above, that are important for school readiness. The study also uncovered that storytime providers are sharing information about the school readiness concepts with children in a variety of ways and providing opportunities for the children to interact with various concepts.⁴

Most importantly, storytime providers were injecting fun and interactive engagement into the ways in which they were presenting these school readiness concepts. They did this in part by encouraging children to answer questions, act things out, repeat content with them, and/or move and engage their bodies.

These are all things that you are probably doing as well, but do you know why they are important? Children learn best when they are mentally active and engaged, so when you provide them with the opportunity to engage with a concept in a play-based, interactive manner, you are

supporting their learning in a highly effective, developmentally appropriate way.⁵

Furthermore, VIEWS2 found that when storytime providers incorporated intentionality and interactivity into the planning and delivery of their storytime, they were able to increase the early literacy content and the early literacy behaviors of the children attending. Therefore, it is possible that being intentional and interactive with learning across a variety of domains identified as important for school readiness would help to increase young children’s acquisition of the knowledge and skills that are crucial for success with learning in school.

What does this mean for you and your programs for young children? In addition to getting children ready to read, you can also get them ready to learn math, pay attention, write, control behavior and emotions, and interact with others.

You can prepare them for these skills in fun, engaging, and play-based ways through the ECRR practices that you already incorporate into your programs. And you can be more impactful by being intentional and interactive with them using the following methods.

Support emergent math skills by:

- inviting children to count along with you;
- having them identify numbers;
- pointing to items when you count them;
- asking children to count how many of something are present; and
- having children count how many are there after adding things or taking things away.

Support attention skills by:

- including visual clues to complement verbal instructions;
- asking similar, repetitive questions while reading so children learn what to attend to;
- providing prompts for children to use their listening ears; and
- working with caregivers to provide gentle redirects for children when they are not paying attention.

Support writing skills by:

- Providing children opportunities to practice writing/scribbling through nametags and/or craft;
- Incorporating finger plays that include detailed finger motions; and

- Talking about and providing ways for children to practice with letter shapes (e.g., painting letters in the air or forming letters out of pipe cleaners).


Support behavioral and emotional self-regulation by:

- Talking about and including books on behaviors and emotions;
- Providing opportunities for children to talk about appropriate behavior and to identify emotions;
- Providing clear, simple expectations for behavior;
- Encouraging children and their caregivers to take a break if they are struggling to control behavior and/or emotions.

Support social skills by:

- Talking about and including books that highlight friendships and other social concepts;
- Providing opportunities for children to interact with one another in storytime (e.g., pairing up to do the motions of a song or rhyme together); and
- Providing opportunities for children to interact in an unstructured manner during block, dramatic, or open playtime.

The most important piece to incorporating these skills is using a fun, interactive, play-based approach that incorporates the knowledge and skills important for school readiness. It also shows children that learning can be fun and enjoyable, which lays a foundation for engagement in lifelong learning.

Additionally, this approach helps further cement the library’s role in early learning as a play-filled environment that encourages children to try new things, build new skills, and learn through play. 

References

1. Alice F. Cross, and Michael Conn-Powers, “A Working Paper: New Information about School Readiness,” (Early Childhood Center, Indiana University, 2011).
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3. Mills, “Early Literacy in Library Storytimes, Part 2.”
4. Campana, “The Multimodal Power of Storytime.”
5. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek et al., “Putting Education in ‘Educational’ Apps: Lessons from the Science of Learning,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 16, no. 1 (2015): 3–34.