

# Fostering Readers

## Addressing the Knowledge Gap for Serving Beginning Readers

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**H**ow do we support children who have aged out of our 0–5 storytimes?”

With the introduction of great resources like Every Child Ready to Read and Babies Need Words Every Day, this question popped up more and more in electronic mailing lists, social-media groups, and in-person chats. The truth is, library staff all over the map are doing some really great things for emerging readers in kindergarten and beyond. This question says more about youth library staff’s desire for the confidence that research-based activities can equip us with than our actual ability to work with this age group.

Considering this question is what spawned the Fostering Readers project (<https://fosteringreaders.weebly.com>).

When we first brainstormed this project, we weren’t sure what the final product would look like. We were certain, however, about three aspects of the project. We wanted

1. the materials to be developed by practitioners who currently work with children;
2. the practitioners to consist of librarians and reading specialists, and at least one of each of them to be fluent in English and Spanish; and
3. the content to be flexible, with resources that could be easily scaled up or down.

We partnered with OregonASK, the state’s professional organization of afterschool providers, to broaden our reach and braid resources. After a successful Institute of Museum and Library Services Library Services and Technology Act grant application through the State Library of Oregon, we held a statewide search for our contracted team of experts. We contracted with four practitioners:

- Deborah Giltlitz, community librarian/bibliotecaria comunitaria at Wilsonville (OR) Public Library
- Jen Burkart, district literacy specialist at Beaverton (OR) Public School District
- Kari Kunst, youth services supervisor at Tigard (OR) Public Library
- Kelli Scardina, senior advisor for equity and systems improvement for emergent bilingual students at Education Northwest (Portland, OR)

The practitioners started by creating an extensive research review. The completed sixty-five-page review is available for free on the Fostering Readers website (<https://fosteringreaders.weebly.com/research-review.html>), with practical implications from the research featured under each heading for easy reference.

The research review resulted in five Key Elements to include in activities for beginning readers, and five Key Strategies.



## The Key Elements of Fostering Readers

1. **Read-alouds:** They aren't just for preschoolers. All children benefit from being read to!
2. **Book browsing and choice:** Access, choice, and time engaging with text supports an interest in reading, which can result in success in school.
3. **Nurture diversity:** Be sure to include and celebrate diverse characters and experiences in books, and make sure literacy activities are culturally responsive.
4. **Draw connections:** Encourage children to find connections to the text and experiences they've already had or things that they know. Meaningful learning happens when we are able to make connections between what we're reading, ourselves, and our world.
5. **Have fun:** This is self-explanatory! You can make a program, lesson, event, or passive program as you normally would, and boost the literacy engagement with Fostering Readers.

## The Key Strategies of Fostering Readers

1. **Read-aloud interactively:** During the read-aloud, be sure to help children observe and discuss illustrations or other images; clarify meaning through explanation, acting out, or retelling; and help them understand vocabulary in context by explaining, showing, and comparing.
2. **Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS):** A research-based education nonprofit founded by cognitive psychologist Abigail House and museum educator Philip Yenawine, VTS developed an inquiry-based method of using art to teach visual literacy, thinking, and communication skills. You can use this method while looking at the pictures in a book! The three VTS questions are: (1) What's going on in this picture? (2) What do you see that makes you say that? (3) What else can you find? There are no wrong answers to these open-ended questions.
3. **Discuss with a buddy:** Opportunities to discuss with a peer help with furthering comprehension and practicing language skills. Encourage conversation through "neighbor share/pair share."
4. **Extend language:** Extending language for children is a powerful tool to model new vocabulary words that are related to words they already know, so they can use the new word right away. Rephrase or extend participant comments or responses, increasing the richness and accuracy of the language being used.
5. **Nurture diversity:** Empower participants as experts in their own language or languages. Encourage reading, writing, and sharing in any language(s) individual attendees are most comfortable.

From the Key Elements and Key Strategies, our team of practitioners created sample activities designed to be used in your library. No planning time? Our extended activity plans have everything you need, including scripts to use during the program. Want to take one or two ideas from each activity and add them to an existing program? You can do that, too. On the Fostering Readers website, you can also find ideas for passive programs and for adding the Key Elements and Key Strategies to traditional storytimes for children in grades K-3.

After the initial development of Fostering Readers materials, we received a second year of funding through the State Library of Oregon and the Library Services and Technology Act. We contracted with NPC Research to create and run a limited pilot project that would help us recognize challenges and improve the resources to make them easier to use.

This resulted in the creation of the Streamlined Activity Plans and an increased highlight on the Key Elements and Key Strategies.

What do our pilot sites think about using these resources? We decided to ask them just that.

## Pilot Site Responses

Amy Wycoff, youth services senior librarian at Beaverton (OR) City Public Library, does not have any current plans to use the Fostering Readers materials in future programs, but adds, "it's nice that those plans are now available on the website if I should need to refer to them in the future." Wycoff has, however, incorporated things she learned from the Fostering Readers materials in other programs for elementary-age children: "I have added in on occasion a time for kids to flip through a nonfiction title (from a selection displayed at the program) and then find one new fact to share with the other kids (or just one-on-one with another kid at their table). They seem to like the challenge of finding a new fact to share."

Asked if she had any tips to share with library staff who wish to try out Fostering Readers, she shared, "It's a great idea to pick and choose what will work best for your group of kids and location. I didn't know this during the pilot but later learned that from other participating libraries. I tried to stick to the more formal lesson plans and that was really difficult at my location because our programs are usually more hands-on and informal in nature here. Spending lots of time on the hands-on activities or adding in an additional activity or two would keep the group more engaged in the content of the programs."

Susan Cackler, library supervisor and programs coordinator at Banks (OR) Public Library, shared her experiences in a narrative about Banks's successful summer programming series, Camp Big Read:

When I used the Fostering Readers materials as part of the pilot project, it was a pretty intensive read-through of all of the materials for me and I even printed the script for the very first one. By the end of the pilot, I was much more comfortable with feeling that I could do the program and the students justice even if I wasn't sticking 100 percent to the curriculum as it was written, but I still referenced the lesson plans often for each lesson.

When I used the Fostering Readers materials this summer as part of our Camp Big Read, the lesson plans had been changed into a shorter format and I was working with teachers with a combined fifty years of experience, so I was able to use them in a more casual way. They were really an excellent resource for this because the center of each lesson was something fun and educational, and the lessons include some structure for how to get there. The teachers were able to read over the plan briefly and use their experience to really get to the nugget of each day. They loved having a plan that they didn't have to come up with and that was easy to execute in the time that we had with the kids. We plan to put Camp Big Read on again next year and we will most likely use the lessons again!

I can't emphasize enough how much of a help Fostering Readers was in my ability to put on Camp Big Read. I had hoped to be able to pay the teachers, in which case they would have developed their own curriculum and lesson plans, but we didn't get as much grant money as we hoped and the teachers agreed to be volunteers. That meant that the burden of planning Camp Big Read landed more squarely in my lap than I had anticipated. The teachers probably would have been willing to volunteer more, but that didn't seem fair to me. Having the lesson plans meant we could just plug one into each day of the camp, I could get the books from the book lists [on the Fostering Readers website] and we were ready to do a literacy camp! It also meant we could take turns presenting the main part of the lesson, so the students got to experience a variety of teaching styles.

I am also not certain that I would have been confident enough in my abilities to present literacy lessons to students

if I had not done them already [during the pilot project]. I had to make the decision of whether we would attempt the camp before we got notification of receiving the grant money and I'm not sure I would have believed we could pull it off if I hadn't had the Fostering Readers experience.

The partnership with the school in general—and with these two teachers in particular—has been a huge bonus to the library and our community. Camp Big Read was very visible in our community and very well-received. We went to the local park every day and we encountered different people who were happy to see kids out and about, learning and having fun. Our Friends group is passionate about getting books in the hands of children, so they were tickled with the fact that we were engaging some students who do not regularly participate in our Summer Reading Program. I learned a lot from observing the teachers teach and they learned a lot about how to have students succeed in a fun and unstructured format. The influence of Fostering Readers in my experience this summer is present in a lot of fairly intangible ways, but the end result was a really successful, fun program that boosted awareness of the library in our community and reached students with direct, one-on-one teacher contact.”

Later in the fall of 2019, Cackler contacted us to let us know that Camp Big Read, and the Fostering Readers materials, had a lasting effect on participants. She emailed, saying, “A parent of one of the Camp Big Read kids (who I haven't seen for a while) came in. I asked her how her daughter is doing and she said, ‘great, she's really started picking up a lot of books since she participated in the camp.’” She then included a series of enthusiastic and affirming exclamation points. &

*Fostering Readers resources are available to use free for your library programming and partnerships. You can also create your own activities to share (<https://fosteringreaders.weebly.com/create-your-own-activities.html>). Fostering Readers is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services through the Library Services and Technology Act, administered by the State Library of Oregon.*