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Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

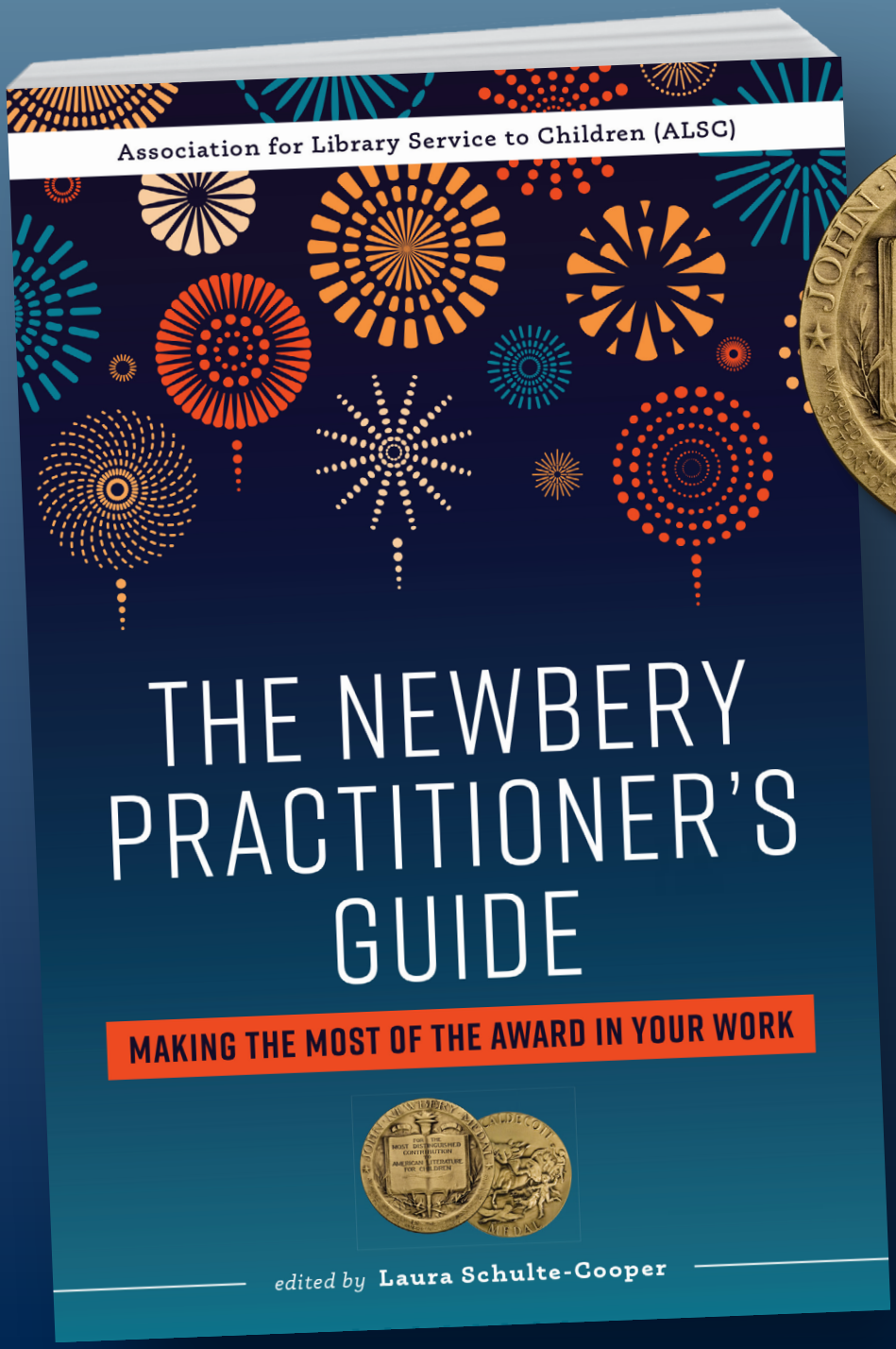
ALSC
ASSOCIATION FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN

Couples Who Collaborate: Tony and Angela DiTerlizzi

Really Dramatic Play Areas

Family Place Initiative in Practice

Celebrate a century of the Newbery Medal with this handy guide from ALSC!



This book digs in and explores where the distinguished award intersects with library work in a range of areas such as collection policy, advocacy, programming, EDI efforts, and censorship. Recognized experts in the fields of library service to youth, children's literature, and education present strategies, guidance, and tips to support practitioners in making the most of the Newbery in their work.

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100 1922–2022 Newbery
A Century of Distinguished Children's Books

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Man's best friends! Books and dogs! Millie listens to the Harry Potter series on her library systems' hoopla app while following along in her book; therapy dog in training Pearl is there to snuggle!
Photo by Kelly Hayes.

Editor's Note

The Books of My Life

By Sharon Verbeten

We all have books that have impacted our lives, for many different reasons. I bet you'd be able to think back now and come up with a few; here are a few of mine.

Books from Childhood. I'm from a middle-class family from Wisconsin, not far from Racine, where Little Golden Books were born. So it doesn't surprise me that my two favorite children's books were those amazing golden-spined gems. Topping my list of reads and re-reads was Margaret Wise Brown's *Mister Dog*, still in print today. I'm not sure if it was the shaggy attractiveness of Garth Williams' illustrations of Crispin's Crispian or the fact that he "belonged to himself" that resonated with me. Either way, it was my favorite read of all time. A close second was *The Color Kittens*, yet another treasure by Brown. The colors, the mess—everything about it spoke to me; they remain honored treasures to me, although my battered copies are long gone.

Books from my Teens. I'm sorry to say that although I've always been an avid reader, I think the busy-ness of school, jobs, and teen angst led me to forego one of my favorite pastimes. Obviously, I read with fervor any assigned texts, never reaching for Cliff's Notes. I remember *To Kill a Mockingbird* being one of my early favorites; still is, yes, despite some of its "white savior" controversy today. I later fell into a rabbit hole wanting to learn all I could about the reclusive Harper Lee.

Books from Adulthood. Here it gets tricky because there are so many. But the books that have had the most impact on my life are *On Writing* by Stephen King (which helped me understand that even famous authors once got rejected) and *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke (another love letter to writing).

Since I'm a special needs mom, I also am partial to fiction that features characters with Down syndrome—especially those that outline the challenges. I loved *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*, which tells of a family in the 1960s—the not so long ago past—when a father makes a devastating decision about his child with Down syndrome. I met author Kim Edwards at ALA many years ago, and I had tears in my eyes as I told her how much her book had affected me as a mom.

These are the books that have impacted me; how about you? &

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PEER-REVIEWED

Nurturing Little Bodies and Brains

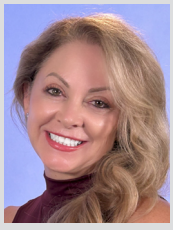
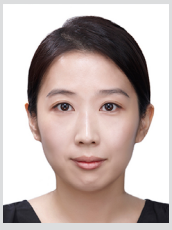
Supporting Brain Development, Learning, and Health for Families

KATHLEEN CAMPANA, MICHELLE BALDINI, JEEYEON CHUN, AND JULIE LOOP

The first years of a child's life are crucial for brain development—more so than any other time in their life. From the moment they enter this world, the clock starts on the critical period of cognitive, emotional, and physical development. The quantity and quality of experiences during this time have a lasting impact on a child's ability to learn and succeed in school and life. This is supported by decades of research that emphasize the significance of these positive learning experiences.[1]

During the years from birth to age five a child's brain goes through a significant amount of growth. All of this occurs before kindergarten, with a newborn's brain doubling in size within the first year and reaching 80 percent of its potential size by age three.[2] Time keeps ticking as the brain connects to long-term learning, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and school readiness. This is where the brain has the potential to create millions of synapses. While genes play a role in determining a brain's potential and processing capacity, a child's healthy development and the strength of their synaptic connections depend on healthy and caring relationships. However, an absence of caring relationships, limited access to quality healthcare, and a lack of early learning experiences can have a negative impact on a child's lifelong health and learning, resulting in long-term effects on their preparation for formal learning environments.[3]

The responsibility of ensuring a solid foundation for early learning, crucial for lifelong learning and development of a healthy brain, lies on the parents and caregivers in the home environment and on childcare centers during this critical time. Some parents and caregivers have the resources and understand how


Kathleen Campana *is an associate professor at Kent State University. Her most recent funded research projects include Project VOICE and Project SHIELD, both funded by IMLS, and Read Baby Read, funded by the William Penn Foundation.* ***Michelle Baldini****, MSLIS, has over thirty years of experience with youth services and education, and has spent over eighteen of those years at Kent State's iSchool. Currently, Baldini is director of the Reinberger Children's Library Center, an internationally recognized special collection and research facility. Baldini has worked as a children's librarian, professional writer, and instructional designer for K-12 educational programs, school media specialist, high school teacher, and director of preschool education.* ***Jeeyeon Chun*** *is a PhD student at Kent State University's School of Information. Her research focuses on the learning that occurs for children and youth in informal learning environments such as STEM learning, making, and digital writing.* ***Julie Loop*** *is a master of library and information science candidate at Kent State University, with an expected graduation of May 2024. She has worked at three different libraries on Kent State's campus: the Reinberger Children's Library Center, the Architecture Branch Library, and the Cataloging and Metadata Department of the main library.*

to support their young child's learning and development during these first few years of life, but many do not, which can lead to wide disparities for young children in terms of brain development, learning, and health that may persist throughout life.[4] Given that training parents and caregivers has been shown to have a positive impact on children's early brain development and early literacy progress,[5] it is possible that these disparities could be addressed through targeted parental education and support.

The disparities in levels of support that parents and caregivers can provide for their young children often exist along socioeconomic and educational attainment lines, with families who have low-income and lower education levels typically being less able to provide a variety of supports for their children than those with higher-income and education levels.[6] To address these disparities in early learning, development, and health and close these knowledge and health gaps, both early childhood and health scholars stress the importance of boosting the ability of parents and caregivers in underserved communities to support early brain development, learning, and health for their young children from day one.[7] Targeted parental education that focuses on early learning, health, and brain development is one way that these disparities could be addressed.

Public Libraries and the Whole Child: Connecting Learning, Health, and Development

Public libraries are valuable community resources that can help bridge health and early learning-related knowledge disparities for families with children aged 0–24 months from underserved communities.[8] Despite having several characteristics that indicate untapped potential to support community health, libraries are often underestimated in their capacity to do so, particularly related to early childhood.[9] At the same time, studies have shown that library programs provide numerous early learning benefits for young children, including supporting early literacy,[10] developing early math skills,[11] enhancing fine and gross motor skills,[12] and promoting social skills.[13]

By understanding the social determinants of health and early learning inequities, libraries can position themselves to better address the needs of families with children aged 0–24 months from underserved communities. Libraries have already demonstrated an understanding of the barriers faced by underserved communities and contributed to increasing education equity for underserved communities by working with a variety of community partners to take programs and services for children and families out into community locations to meet families where they are.[14] By including local healthcare organizations and other community organizations that offer healthcare-related services for families with young children in these partnerships, libraries can provide additional opportunities for families that may otherwise experience barriers to accessing these health-related services. This could also help libraries increase their reach and support of a more diverse range of underserved communities, potentially making a greater impact in addressing health and learning disparities for young children and their families.

Some libraries have recognized the importance of healthcare partnerships and expanded their focus to include general health services, with a specific focus on underserved communities. These services include placing a nurse in library branches, hosting health fairs and screenings, and vaccine clinics, among others.[15] Furthermore, some libraries have collaborated with healthcare organizations and professionals to promote early learning in their communities. These partnerships have taken various forms, including storytimes in hospitals and WIC centers, partnering with Reach Out and Read to provide early literacy resources, book distributions in healthcare centers, and partnering with home-visiting nurses to deliver an early learning program for families.[16]

However, even with understanding the potential of libraries as key players in promoting community health and wellbeing, there is a lack of research that provides insight into how they are partnering with community care organizations to support families with early childhood health and learning during these early years, which underscores the need for further exploration and investment in this area.

The Study

Project SHIELD (Supporting Healthy Infant Early Learning and Development) was an IMLS planning grant that used surveys, interviews, and design workshops to explore the ways public library practitioners can partner with community care organizations to provide more effective support for children 0–24 months and their families from underserved communities around early brain development, learning, and health. This article focuses in on smaller pieces of the study dataset—parent/caregiver interviews and focus groups and library practitioner interviews[17]—to provide insight into the needs families face with supporting their child(ren) during the early years of their child's life, how libraries are currently serving families with children 0–24 months, and how other organizations fit into these efforts.

The following research questions were used to guide the research activities:

RQ1: What needs do families in underserved communities face with being able to support early brain development, learning, and health during the first few years of their children's lives?

RQ2: What are some types of programs and services libraries are offering for families of children 0–24 months? How, if at all, do care organizations fit into these efforts?

Participants

The participants in the study consisted of two groups: parents/caregivers of babies and toddlers and library practitioners offering programs for families of babies and toddlers. The parent/caregiver

group consisted of forty parents and caregivers from underserved groups in a Midwestern city. Recruitment was done through three different organizations that were providing existing services for parents of babies and toddlers from underserved groups: a pregnancy organization, a housing development with robust wraparound services, and community health agency. The only criteria for parents and caregivers to participate was that they had to have a baby or toddler. The parents and caregivers represented diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic groups, but all fit into a low-income classification.

The library group consisted of sixteen library practitioners from ten different states across the nation who were offering programs and services for families of babies and toddlers. The libraries were recruited through calls for participants on national and state-level youth services-focused library discussion lists. The library practitioner participants represented libraries of different sizes, including two small libraries (service population (SP) of 0–24,999), six medium (SP of 50,000–249,999), and eight large libraries (SP of more than 250,000). The libraries were in different types of locales:[18] one in a rural area, two in towns, three in suburban areas, four in cities with a population less than 100,000, and five in cities with a population more than 250,000.[19] Finally, the libraries were spread across the nation with the most located in the Midwest, then the Northeast, followed by the South, and the West (see table 1).

Table 1. Geographic Makeup of Participating Libraries

Region	No. of Libraries	No. of Participating States
Midwest	8	4
Northeast	4	2
South	3	3
West	1	1

Data Collection and Analysis

Virtual research activities were used with the participants since most of the study occurred during the pandemic. The parents/caregivers participated in either a virtual focus group or an interview. Three two-and-a-half-hour focus groups were held in which a majority of parents/caregivers (36) participated. Four additional caregivers could not attend the focus groups due to scheduling issues, so they were able to participate individually via a one-hour interview. Similar questions were used in the focus groups and interviews. Parents and caregivers were asked to share about their experiences with parenting, goals for their children, questions they had about parenting, their experiences with the library as a parent, and more. The library practitioners participated in a one-hour virtual interview. In the library practitioner interviews, they were asked about the programs and services they offer for families of babies and toddlers, their perceptions of the needs and barriers these families face, partnerships for this work, future plans, and more. The interviews and focus groups were all recorded and transcribed and the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. One coder completed all of the coding but engaged in discussions with the rest of the research team around the codes and the application of them to avoid any bias or misinterpretation of the data.

Results from Family Data

In the study, we wanted to understand families' experiences, successes, challenges, and needs because having a more holistic understanding of these families can lead to organizations being able to develop more meaningful and relevant programs and services that meet the desires and needs of these families. To set the stage for understanding their needs and what they want from the library, we asked the parents and caregivers about their hopes, dreams, and goals for their children. The parents and caregivers shared a variety of goals that they had for their children but most related to wanting the best for their children. The most frequent response related to wanting their child to excel at whatever they choose to do in the future, such as one participant who shared, *"I want my children to be mentally healthy and successful in whatever they pursue, no matter what it is."* Other common responses included wanting the following for their children:

1. to be good, decent human beings, as one participant shared: *I just want my children to be decent human beings. I want to raise people that when they get out into this world, don't nobody got to worry about them because they know that they are good in the world.*

2. to be happy, strong, resilient, and independent, as seen in the following quote: *I do affirmations with my children where I say, "you are protected, you are strong, you are brave, you are resilient, and you will be a leader."*

3. to have healthy relationships, as demonstrated in this participant's response: *I want them to be successful and have stable and healthy relationships with people as well as a healthy relationship with themselves.*

4. to have things they themselves didn't have, as one participant shared: *I had such a rough life since I was born, I don't want that for them. I want my kids to have a life that I didn't have growing up.*

Family Needs

The families in the study identified numerous needs that they had in learning and working to raise healthy and happy children. Some common types of needs included learning more about children's development and health, wanting information on supporting learning for their child, opportunities for informal learning support, and information on community resources. Table 2 provides more information on the different types of needs caregivers had related to raising their children.

While sharing these needs around parenting and raising their child(ren), the parents/caregivers also shared extensively about needs that they themselves had to help them be a better caregiver for their child. Some of the more common needs included informal and formal learning opportunities for themselves, strategies

Table 2. Caregivers' Needs Related to Their Children

Caregivers' Needs Related to Children	Detailed Information
Information on children's development and health	Parents/caregivers talked about needing information on the following: ■ health-related topics: vaccines; nutrition (e.g., breastfeeding, formula, solids); teething; potty-training; illnesses; and more ■ development-related topics: if their child's behavior is normal; if their child is meeting developmental milestones; how to identify developmental delays, speech issues, and mental health issues; and more
Information on supporting learning for children	Caregivers talked about wanting the following information on early childhood learning: ■ what their child needs to learn and be able to do in early childhood so that they can be successful in school ■ how they, as the caregiver, can best support topics and skills at home
Opportunities for informal learning support	Caregivers discussed the scarcity of affordable, high-quality daycare and as a result wanted more community-based early learning activities to supplement their child's daycare. As a result, they mentioned wanting early learning activities with the following attributes: ■ late-day schedules to accommodate working parents ■ more baby-focused offerings ■ located in community locations they can access
Information on community resources	Caregivers spoke about the challenges with finding information about community resources. They spoke about the importance having one organization that could pull some of this information together. Some of the community information and resources they mentioned are: ■ lists of high-quality childcare ■ lists of organizations that provided resources related to early childhood ■ promoting early childhood community events through social media

Table 3. Caregivers' Needs Related to Themselves

Caregivers' Needs Related to Themselves	Detailed Information
Self-care	Caregivers mentioned wanting to find time for themselves, to find things they could do to better themselves, and to understand how to set boundaries with their children to maintain a healthy balance for themselves.
Mental health care	Caregivers discussed having mental health struggles and mentioned wanting the following types of support to help them deal with them: ■ non-drug treatment strategies (e.g., mindfulness, yoga) ■ caregiver support groups ■ information on and connections with mental health agencies and services
Community with other caregivers	Caregivers frequently mentioned wanting to find or create community with other caregivers in a similar stage of parenthood. They talked about wanting this community to provide opportunities for their child to socialize but also for themselves to have a place to turn for understanding, empathy, and advice.
Managing and/or improving financial challenges	Caregivers discussed wanting to understand how to better manage their finances (e.g., financial literacy) as well as improving their financial situations (e.g., finding jobs or education).

and opportunities for self-care, mental health resources, and community with other caregivers. Table 3 provides additional information on these needs related to the caregivers themselves. Even though there were no planned interview/focus group questions on the caregivers' needs related to themselves, discussions around these needs arose in every focus group and interview. This suggests that these needs are significant, and that possibly caregivers are having a harder time with getting these needs met.

Current Library Programs and Services for Supporting Families of Children 0–24 Months

In addition to talking with families of very young children, we also talked with library practitioners to understand some of the programs and services they were offering that had aspects specifically focused on supporting young children 0–24 months, and their caregivers. In these interviews we heard about five broad types of programs and services that went beyond baby storytime to address some of the needs related to the children and the caregivers themselves that the caregivers had shared with us. The five main types included four types of programs: parent support groups, pregnancy and new parent classes, parenting classes for after the newborn stage, and expanded baby/toddler storytimes. The fifth category was focused on the baby/toddler services libraries were offering for these families.

Parent Support Groups

The first type of programs that we learned about were parent support groups. These programs often had aspects of information sharing, knowledge building, emotional support and community cultivation built into them. These programs were sometimes developed solely by the library and then the library would bring in guest speakers from different care organizations. In other places these programs were offered in partnership by a library and a care organization where they played an equal role in the development and delivery of the program. As a part of the partnership, the library and care organization would often work to bring in other types of care organizations as guest speakers. The programs were often structured so that there was a presentation or more structured

information sharing involving the library and care organizations at the beginning, followed by questions from the caregivers, and then open sharing and discussion among the caregivers about where they were at with parenting and their current experiences. And while we did not hear about a lot of these parent support groups during the library interviews, they were one of the main programs that caregivers mentioned wanting. And for the support groups we did hear about, the library practitioners reported an incredibly positive reception from the families who participated.

Example of a Parent Support Group

One library participant told us about a weekly new parent support group where they would have a presenter talk for a few minutes about a topic at the beginning. The topics were mostly centered on physical and mental care of both the baby and the caregiver and included things like postpartum yoga, nutrition (e.g., breastfeeding, formula, starting solid foods), baby CPR, and more. After the presentation, the presenter would lead about thirty minutes of discussion with the caregivers. The presenter would then typically leave and for the next thirty to forty-five minutes, the librarian and the caregivers would have a larger discussion based on where they were at with parenting and what they were experiencing. While much of the program series was held via zoom, the librarian did occasionally bring the families together for stroller walks and yoga. The librarian shared that through the program they were able to build a tight-knit community with the caregivers. She talked about how the program supported the caregivers' wellbeing, both mental and physical, by providing a support system of people who are in similar situations to them and by incorporating opportunities for in-person physical activity meetups.

Pregnancy and New Parent Classes

The second type of programs that emerged were pregnancy and new parent classes. These programs differed from the parent support group as they were more specifically focused on increasing the caregiver's health knowledge and wellbeing. These programs were often offered as a series of a few classes and were typically done in partnership with a healthcare organization. Many hospitals, health systems, pregnancy organizations, and even doulas offer classes focused on pregnancy and caring for newborns, but the classes are often not as accessible to underserved communities and may not include as much or any information on literacy, brain development, and bonding. Partnering on a program like this is a way to provide this information to more of your community, particularly underserved groups, and bring in the library's expertise around literacy, brain development, and bonding to increase caregiver knowledge.

Example of a Pregnancy and New Parent Class

A library practitioner shared about a program they partner on with a public health organization. The program is for expecting or recently delivered families, and for families who have adopted or are caring for very recently delivered babies within the first three months of life. Through the partnership, they have offered the program both virtually and in-person at the library. The program consists of three sessions where the first session covers early pregnancy health issues. Then in the second session, they go into deliveries, delivery methods, and making sure that parents know their rights with childbirth. Then in the third session, they talk about infant and newborn care. In that session, they discuss how caregivers can interact with their baby based on how they are developing, the importance of early literacy, and how to incorporate early literacy practices in their day-to-day interactions with their baby. The public health department delivers the content in the first two sessions and the library does the final session along with providing the space and helping with program publicity.

Parenting Classes for after the Newborn Stage

Another type of programs that emerged are parenting programs that focused on building caregiver knowledge around the stages of child development/parenting that come after the early newborn stage. In some ways these are similar to the previous type of program with how they provide information to build caregiver knowledge. The one difference is that they are often a bit more informal and include the child in the program, providing time for caregiver-child interaction. These programs often use a more informal, play-based structure, where there are toys and open spaces for the children and caregivers to interact and play together. The libraries typically brought in a variety of care, early childhood, and early intervention professionals to the program, where they would float around and interact with the children and caregivers. During the interactions the professionals are having conversations with the caregivers, sharing more individualized information, guidance, and feedback, which ultimately helps to build the caregivers' knowledge.

Example of a Parenting Program for after the Newborn Stage

An example of this type of program that was shared with us is a program a library offers for families of older babies and toddlers. The library sets up a wide variety of toys and other play materials such as dolls, blocks, pattern toys, dramatic play materials, gross motor toys, and soft play toys. The families are encouraged to play together and with each other. Different specialists are brought to each session to talk to the caregivers about topics like speech, nutrition, literacy, and gross motor development. While the families play, the specialist goes around and talks individually to each family about their child's particular development. The librarian talked about this individual time with specialists being particularly important for the communities who live in health resource deserts and may not have access to these specialists and the opportunities to get individualized information related to their child.

Expanded Baby/Toddler Storytimes

The fourth type of program we heard about involved baby/toddler storytimes. It was where libraries were adding additional pieces to baby/toddler storytimes to specifically support the caregivers. Most often this was done by adding a playtime to the storytime, but libraries were using the playtimes in different ways. One library talked about using it to give caregivers a little break and allow them to have side conversations and talk with a person that's going through the same thing or just really talk

Table 4. Three Types of Partners in Library Programs and Services for Families with Children 0–24 Months

Type of Organization	Specific Examples
Healthcare organizations	■ public health organizations (e.g., WIC, health department) ■ nutritionists ■ gross motor specialists (e.g., OT, PT, pediatric yoga) ■ NICUs (neonatal intensive care unit) ■ pediatricians ■ home visiting nurses ■ OB/GYN (obstetrics & gynecologists) ■ speech/hearing specialists ■ pediatric dentists ■ hospitals ■ community health workers
Broader care/family services organizations	■ social workers ■ child development/intervention organizations (e.g., Help Me Grow, YMCA, Lena) ■ parenting organizations ■ pregnancy organizations ■ organizations focused on both fatherhood and motherhood ■ family services government agencies
Education organizations	■ daycares/preschools ■ school districts ■ organizations supporting children with disabilities ■ literacy and learning campaigns ■ early childhood initiatives/coalitions ■ museums ■ organizations that distribute free books to families (e.g. Reach Out and Read and the Imagination Library)

with another adult. The librarian discussed how she plays with the children for about ten minutes to get them engaged and then mingles and plays what she calls "baby matchmaker" and tries to introduce and pair up caregivers so they can build community and have support. Another example is where libraries offer the playtime after storytime but bring in care professionals to mingle and provide informal guidance and information to the caregivers. Through these additions to storytimes, libraries are supporting caregiver knowledge, mental well-being, and community.

Example of an Expanded Baby/Toddler Storytime

A library participant told us about a storytime-playgroup that they offer in partnership with their local early childhood coalition. The program is open to families with babies to about three-year-olds (depending on older sibling ages). The partnership began during COVID as a virtual storytime/playgroup to give families a chance to connect with each other since they were so isolated. Since then, they moved the program to a local park. The librarian offers a storytime and then the early childhood coalition usually brings some supplies for an open-ended creative activity (e.g., making things with play dough or clay, painting, coloring). A playground is also located at the park so the kids can play. According to the librarian, they "try to make it an opportunity where the parents can talk about what they've been through and what they're dealing with and a parent educator [from the early childhood coalition] is there, so she can talk to them about any concerns that they have."

Services for Families of Babies and Toddlers

In addition to the programs that libraries were offering for families with children 0–24 months, they were also offering a variety of services to address these families' needs. Some libraries were serving as community connectors and working to connect these families to other needed resources in the community. They did this by providing contacts for social services, offering service fairs at the library so families had easy access to a variety of social service organizations, developing and sharing lists of high-quality childcares, and referring the families to early intervention organizations and specialists.

The libraries were also trying to address early learning needs by providing ideas for free resources and items parents/caregivers can use to support brain development and early learning at home. One library mentioned that they offer a drop-in service where they show parents/caregivers how to make something that they can then use to support learning at home, such as a book out of Ziploc baggies or a shaving cream bag for practicing fine motor skills. Other libraries talked about trying to lessen caregiver stress by partnering with corporations to be able to provide necessary baby resources for free such as diapers, formula, and pack and plays. Libraries also mentioned providing permanent or temporary baby play spaces to give caregivers of very young children a safe place where they can go to get out of the house with their baby and see other people since being a new caregiver can be so isolating and there are not many community places for babies and toddlers.

Partners for Supporting Families of Children 0–24 Months

In the conversations with library practitioners, we did hear about many different community organizations who were partnering with their local library in these efforts. While we were looking more specifically at the care partners, a wide variety of other types of partners emerged as having a role in these efforts. Our initial analysis of the data revealed four broad types of partners in these efforts:

healthcare partners, broader care and family service partners, educational partners, and then the catchall of "other" organizations, which mainly ended up consisting of the Lions and the Rotary clubs. Table 4 provides specific examples of partners from the data across the three main types: healthcare partners, broader care and family service partners, and educational partners.

Recommendations

The library participant data revealed that the libraries who participated in the study are providing a variety of services for families of children 0–24 months that address some of the needs caregivers from underserved communities had related to parenting their children. However, work is still needed to address some of the needs that emerged during the study. In addition, because the family participants represented only one state, there are likely some needs related to raising very young children that were not represented in the dataset. Furthermore, apart from some parent support groups, we did not see as many library programs and services that were addressing the needs caregivers from underserved communities had identified for themselves. This could be addressed by going directly to the families of children 0–24 months in your communities to see what they want and need from the library. Reach out to organizations that already have relationships with families of children 0–24 months from underserved communities—such as housing developments, pregnancy and parenting groups, child and family service organizations, and public health departments—to connect with and begin to build relationships with these families. Explore how you can enhance your current baby/toddler programs to also support health and development by incorporating specialists in these areas. Think about how you could also use these programs to better support the caregivers with community building, open discussions around their experiences, and increasing their knowledge during these early years.

Community partners also play an important role in these efforts. As we learned from our library participants, a wide variety of community organizations are available to partner with in these efforts. Reaching out to and partnering with these different organizations can help you and the library gain greater recognition in the community for what you can do and provide for young children and families in your community. Partnering can also help all organizations involved to increase their reach in the community while potentially conserving resources, since multiple organizations are contributing resources to the efforts. Finally, partnering with these different organizations can help to supplement the expertise that you may lack, such as early intervention and early childhood health topics.

Conclusion

The data from Project SHIELD has demonstrated that libraries can provide valuable early childhood health, development, and learning assistance to parents and caregivers who face barriers in accessing quality care and support services for children aged 0–24 months by offering tailored family engagement and early learning programs that support early brain development and health. Libraries have a vital role to play in these efforts so we encourage you to reach out to the families of children 0–24 months and the care organizations in your community that serve these families to identify and understand how you can all work together to support these families during the early and formative years of their child's life. There is a lasting value with providing rich early experiences, and interventions that support healthy development in early childhood as they can lead to lifelong positive impacts. Such interventions are prudent investments that can reduce disparities and provide opportunities to help underserved communities, ultimately benefiting our society as a whole. &

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Practice the Practices

Kids Learn Big in Dramatic Play Areas

TERRY EHLE, TAMI FEUERSTEIN, AND SALLY TAYLOR

A moving child is a learning child. Playing is the best way to learn. And the number one factor in preparing children for success is loving interaction between them and their primary caregivers—the parents or "embedded" persons who are their first, favorite, and most important teachers.

Those research-based beliefs are the foundation of the Lester (Two Rivers, WI) Public Library's (LPL) early literacy approach, and we build upon it by incorporating into all programs, including dramatic play, the American Library's Association's Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) five early literacy practices: read, talk, play, write, and sing.

What children and families need are the opportunities to *practice* the practices. Dramatic play—or pretend play—is so much more than fun; it's a learning experience that engages virtually every part of a child's developing brain. Kids love to take on role-playing scenarios like parent and child, cashier and customer, or characters in a book.

This kind of play is an integral part of a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. It strengthens crucial skills like self-regulation, helping children inhibit their impulses, coordinate with others, and make plans. Disagreements between children crop up naturally in dramatic play, offering the chance for conflict resolution—working through their differences and arranging a compromise. It provides opportunities to see functional print like words and numbers on envelopes, mailboxes, menus, and signs, giving them experience with the many ways we use text every day. And it increases reading comprehension; children often act out scenes from favorite stories, and that helps them gain deeper understanding of a story.

The city of Two Rivers has a population of 11,300. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 49.4 percent of students are economically disadvantaged.[1] While we're located in a beautiful natural setting on the shore of Lake Michigan, options for play are not numerous, particularly during long, cold winters.

We identified a need for a safe (and weather-proof!) space for families to play. We set out to fill that need and create life-long library users, so we actualized an environment that families want to be in and return to frequently.

Terry Ehle *is Youth Services Coordinator at the Lester Public Library in Two Rivers, WI. She holds a masters of library and information science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and has been advocating for youth in her community for twenty-six years.* ***Tami Feuerstein*** *is Lester Public Library's early literacy specialist and has been implementing research-based playful early childhood education for almost four decades.* ***Sally Taylor*** *(not pictured) is Lester Public Library's Public Relations Assistant and has been making Terry and Tami sound good since 2016.*

Dramatic play at LPL started small. In 2016, we erected a post office that consisted of a table, an old wooden shelf with compartments (formerly for tax forms), paper and envelopes (staff collected junk mail for months), and a mailbox made from a big box and blue paper. It was a hit!

From then on, we made the decision to incorporate dramatic play as an *intentional* component of youth programming. When we received a donation from an early childhood association, we purchased a kitchen set that debuted as a hot cocoa stand (such a set can be enough to create countless scenarios if you need to stay small!).

Nowadays, we create a whole environment that encompasses book displays, lots of props, wall art, giant trees, and dangling words, clouds, airplanes, tools, or giant fluffy ice cream cones that enhance a playful experience. We introduce three new scenarios each year.

A sampling of our centers:

- **LPL Air:** an airport with security gate, luggage scanner, ticket counter, a snack center. And a plane, of course. Featuring a cockpit with switches, knobs, gauges, and lights (it was built from spare parts donated by the city's public works department).

- The **Building Readers Construction Zone**, inspired by *Tap Tap Bang Bang* by Emma Garcia: dozens of big wrapped boxes for building, and a foreperson's trailer with hard hats, tool belts, coffee, clipboards, and blueprints.

- **Heartsville Post Office**, inspired by *The Day It Rained Hearts* by Felicia Bond: a writing center, package sorting, a community of paper houses sporting dollar-store mailboxes, and a pen-pal partnership with the senior center.

- **Camp ReadALot:** campsites with firepits containing real logs and stones, crocheted s'mores, and trails throughout the youth area delineated by painter's tape.

- **Ocean Research Center:** a lab submerged into a marine habitat, a cardboard submarine reading nook, and a sea turtle rescue center.

- **Sweets Bakery:** a plethora of crocheted sweet treats, including cookies, cupcakes, macaroons, fruit tarts, and more.

- A **Farmers Market** with pumpkins, tomatoes, carrots, zucchini, honey, and jams for sale.

Dramatic Play in Progress

Where do we get our ideas? The internet. We're not convinced we've had a single original idea. Search for "airport dramatic play" to find all the inspiration needed.

How it comes together (for us). Tami and I are the 1.6 employees that make up the youth staff. I come up with the general vision for the new center, then Tami and I collaborate to sketch it out in sophisticated detail *(um, it's actually been a scratchy pencil drawing on scrap paper every single time*).

Continuous collaboration ensues as we think carefully about details that scaffold learning, or offer multiple ways of learning—like laminated LPL Air boarding passes that can also be utilized

Dramatic Play Myths

- *A large budget is required.* You can make anything out of boxes and paper (including all that packing paper contained in book deliveries). Raid staff basements and garages. Crocheted items like food and animals hold up better than plastic toys! Folks offer to crochet items for us often! Find the crafters in your community and take full advantage of them. Our original 2017 donation for dramatic play was $4,000, and it's still funding the center today! We use those funds to purchase items we use again and again like hard hats and serving trays. We have received subsequent donations with which we've purchased more furniture. Paint and paper come out of our program budget.
- *A huge staff is required.* Our youth room is not staffed. Volunteers help put everything up.

Dramatic Play Pitfalls

- *It's messy—but not always.* We reset for fifteen minutes every morning, though some days we're too busy. To guide patrons, we post photos of where everything belongs.
- *Items get broken—always.* Don't use your best china. If you borrow items, tell the lender it will likely get damaged (we rarely borrow from the public). Your dramatic play mantra must be "let it go." Focus on the 98 percent who play nice.
- *It's noisy.* But your staff will grow to love that joyful noise as delighted patrons bestow accolades upon the library pretty much every day.
- *Children will not want to leave.* Provide timers to help families transition, both for cleanup and departure. Plus, you know that if they don't want to leave, it means they'll want to come back again and again; GOAL ACHIEVED!

Find pictures of our centers in action at www.flickr.com/photos/lesterpubliclibrary.

for a wall-mounted letter-matching activity (families often tell us they discover new ways to play at every visit). Scenarios reflect experiences to build background knowledge: LPL Air passengers run boarding passes under a (nonfunctioning) scanner as they board; small suitcases are manipulated along a conveyor belt and through x-ray (pictures of scanned bags are posted to show examples); the body scanner contains the image of a skeleton; airport employees load suitcases onto a baggage cart (an old wagon) and load them into the cargo hold; air marshallers don vests and manipulate the safety wands; and tarmac and runway activities are depicted beyond the airport windows.

We literally go big with artwork because we can; we have wall space and a high ceiling that art can be attached to and hung from (and a lift to do it with). We blow up art with an old-school overhead projector and then paint and paint… and paint.

Manual labor is delegated to two *lucky* husbands who excel at everything from hanging big pieces of art to cockpit construction.

A question often asked by other youth staff: How do I get my director on board? We're fortunate; ours supports us 100 percent. We suggest you go all *Field of Dreams* on your director: *If you build it, they will come*. And not just patrons and visitors; monetary donations supporting a dramatic play center may come your way too, as they did for us.

Another word of advice: It helps to know your stuff; review research on the importance of play. Whenever the opportunity arises, it's valuable information to share with your director, caregivers, educators, community outreach organizations, and service organizations (who may be looking for projects to support).

To maintain participation statistics, help desk staff are requested to count the number of people in the center once per shift. Counts are only taken during non-programming times—when folks are there simply to play on their own.

Participation in youth programming rose from 8,583 in 2017 to 15,522 in 2023. The number of programs offered has remained about the same. What has changed is participation in the dramatic play center.

A recent one-month snapshot: In February 2024 when LPL Air opened, staff counted 34 times throughout the month and recorded 445 participants.

Oh, the dramatic exploits we've overheard. The delighted facial expressions, gasps, and exclamations when children rush in and encounter a new scenario is a joy to witness. We have out-of-town visitors who make regular treks to see what we've created. Grandparents tell us their grandchildren prefer a trip to the library over all other activities. We had at least one family whose children's first real-life plane trip went smoothly after flying LPL Air. &

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Play On!

Bee Cave Public Library and the Family Place Initiative

MELISSA BLACKWELL BURKE

On any given Tuesday morning, Bee Cave Public Library in Texas is bustling with families. When the doors open, the toddler crowd and their grown-ups, usually sixty to eighty people, gather and head upstairs to our community room for storytime.

After a lively half-hour program, those same families stream downstairs and fill our children's space to visit, play with blocks and toys, and read books. After a while, the group thins out when it's time for lunch and naps. As the families leave, they have bags loaded with library books slung over a shoulder or tucked into their stroller. This scene will be repeated twice more each week, year around.

Experiences like this are happening in libraries all across the country. At Bee Cave Public Library, and in more than five hundred libraries in the United States, families are immersed in a Family Place Libraries experience with every library visit.

About Family Place Libraries

The Family Place Libraries initiative promotes a national model for public libraries to serve families of young children—especially from birth to age three. The practices are designed to establish the library as a starting place for early learning that supports the role of parents as first teachers.

To become a designated Family Place Library, the first step is to attend the National Training Institute at Middle Country Library on Long Island, New York. Attendees take a deep dive into topics that include infant brain development, child development, emergent literacy, parent engagement and education, and space design.

After this in-depth training, the staff returns to their library to plan and implement the philosophies and services. The national network team provides ongoing technical assistance and site support that includes training webinars, one-on-one email/phone consultation, and an onsite visit. After libraries earn their initial certification, there is a simple recertification process each year.

Bee Cave's Family Place Beginning

Bee Cave Public Library is located in the scenic Texas Hill Country just outside of Austin. Our library sits in a mixed-use development that offers shopping, dining, and entertainment as well as residential and office space. Bee Cave prides itself in being a "small but mighty" library for the creative ways we use our limited space to serve our growing community.

Melissa Blackwell Burke *is a youth services librarian at Bee Cave (TX) Public Library.*

We attract patrons from many surrounding communities in our rapidly growing part of the state. Families with young children make up a big percentage of our users, and our storytimes and other children's programs have been among our most popular offerings.

We first learned about the Family Place Libraries program in 2015. The Texas State Library was offering its second wave of grants to encourage Texas libraries to adopt the Family Place model of service that had been well established on the East Coast since the 1970s.

After attending the training, our library staff made a presentation to our City Council to introduce them to the Family Place philosophy and share its impact on our services to families with young children. After getting City Council's approval, we implemented the Family Place Libraries model and services and received formal accreditation in 2017.

How Family Place Looks at Bee Cave

Family Place Libraries provide a number of key elements to patrons. And each library has some flexibility in how the core components come into play. And we do mean *play,* since learn-through-play is central to the Family Place service model. Here's how we apply Family Place principles to several areas at Bee Cave Public Library.

Specially Designed Space

The children's space in a Family Place Library is meant to be welcoming for families with young children to explore whenever the library is open. We already had a basic foundation of picture books and board books, but finding room to add toys presented a challenge. We made room in two small corners, adding soft building blocks in one pocket of space and a child-sized writing desk in another.

Block play holds wide appeal for children and provides opportunities to practice motor skills, problem-solving, mathematical skills, imagination, and so much more. The desk became a dramatic play station that rotates every couple of months, using toys and simple materials to imagine a chicken coop, a pizza parlor, a vet's office, a florist, and a barbecue grill (*this is Texas, after all!)* to name a few. We love to watch our young patrons make a beeline—at Bee Cave!—for the corner that has become the most popular area of the library.

The Parenting Collection

Of course, the most obvious resource a library can provide is books. Some of the books in our parenting collection are adult nonfiction books on topics of interest to parents of young children. Others are picture books that a caregiver might want to share with a child to provide information and spark discussion on a particular topic, such as the death of a pet or growing up with a sibling who has special needs.

Through a $2,300 grant from the Texas Book Festival, we grew our collection of parenting books when we first implemented the Family Place Libraries model. This collection is shelved conveniently near the play area for easy access by caregivers who may not get to visit other sections of the library with young children in tow.

Trained Staff

Each of our current four librarians have attended the four-day Family Place Library training institute in Long Island, the last one as recently as spring 2024. We've held our own on-site orientations to share the mission of the program with our circulation team as well. This way, all staff that families come in contact with during their library visits hold these critical concepts in mind.

The Caregiver-Child Workshops

Our version of the caregiver-child workshop, offered twice a year, is called 1*2*3 PlaySmart. It's designed to connect toddlers and their parents or caregivers with community resources and reinforce the importance of "learning through play" for children. We ask participants to commit to attend for an hour once per week over the course of five weeks.

This play time is meant to give families dedicated opportunities for play and bonding. The room is laid out with a number of stations of interactive toys and is particularly helpful for first-time parents to reinforce their role as their child's first teacher. The experience is hands-on and encourages caregivers to follow their child's lead as to where and how they want to play. Children might be drawn to the transportation rug with its cars, trucks,

and trains; the pretend kitchen and dining area; or the soft slide, tunnel, and rocking boat, for example.

While the "hardscape" remains the same throughout the workshop, the exploratory table changes each week to young patrons' absolute delight. This area of sensory exploration is a clear favorite of many toddlers. You might find little ones sorting pom poms by color or scooping colored rice in bins or rolling out soft modeling dough.

Another weekly change in the workshop is the community resource specialist. Each week, a different early childhood expert in the areas of child development, nutrition, literacy, motor skills, or speech and language attends to answer caregivers' individual questions in a casual setting.

Why We Love Being a Family Place Library

We've always been a family-friendly library. Joining the Family Place team reinforced what we already believed about the library's role and gave a structured way to accomplish that.

Now the programs we plan and materials we buy for children's services are viewed through the lens of Family Place philosophies, streamlining best practices and bringing a sense of cohesiveness.

Our weekly storytimes—two family storytimes and one infant lapsit storytime called Baby Bumblebees!—bring in a lot of families, but Family Place has helped us meet new families who came to be a part of our 1*2*3 PlaySmart workshops. Many of these families continue as valued library patrons long after the workshop ends.

New families coming to the library are always happy to see our offerings for young children. They are amazed, impressed, and thankful for the children's area with its extensive book collection and play area. It's so rewarding to see an adult and child reading together in one of the comfy seats. And watching the creativity as they enjoy the toys brings smiles to everyone.

We lean into the resources the Family Place Libraries national team provides, such as professional development videos, bibliographies for collection development, partnership and outreach resources, and marketing materials. Family Place has recently partnered with Baker & Taylor to offer Family Place libraries access to ParentTV, a database that offers thousands of on-demand videos and courses to support the parenting and care of children from birth to teens.

We've also established strong partnerships with the resource professionals that come to the 1*2*3 PlaySmart workshops and have been able to utilize them for other collaborations.

Of course, all libraries dealt with ripples caused by the pandemic and being closed to the public for a time. In a testament to the power of libraries creating a sense of community through programs, a patron shared a wonderful anecdote with us recently.

One of the moms attending our most recent 1*2*3 PlaySmart with her second child shared the story of attending the workshop in 2020 with her first child, right before the pandemic caused the library and the rest of the world to shut down. She described how eight families who met for the first time at Bee Cave's Family Place workshop formed a "pod" that got them through the whole pandemic together. The families are still in touch to this day, some even becoming best friends. We love this example of us fulfilling one of our missions to be a place of connection and community building.

Speaking of the pandemic, after we reopened in 2021, we noticed that a lot of our program attendees skewed younger than it had before. Our all-ages programs are now often attended mostly by toddlers and their caregivers. Both our Family Place workshops and play area help to meet the needs of having even more very young patrons through our doors.

At the end of the day, what we value most about being a Family Place Library are the experiences we are able to provide for our patrons that they take with them beyond our walls and into their homes. Workshop attendee Danny Browne, parent of twins, shared, "Before this workshop, I thought I was playing with my kids at home, but I really wasn't. This workshop has shown me that just being near them while they are playing isn't the same thing as actually playing with them."

Linnea Hopper has attended the workshop with two of her children and looks forward to bringing her youngest child soon. She said, "One of my favorite things as a parent attending the program was being able to play with my child away from home where I didn't have the typical distractions to pull me away such as laundry and dishes. I was able to see which interests my littles gravitated towards the most. I feel so blessed to have been able to access a program like this in my own neighborhood. It's hard to believe that a program of its caliber is offered at no cost! Such is the beauty of local libraries! I will always cherish the enriching time we spent together at 1*2*3 PlaySmart."

Planning for a New Library

We have our eye on plans for a new library with more space. As we discuss our hopes and dreams, we keep the philosophy of Family Place in mind as we design our children's spaces and services. One thing is definite—Bee Cave Public Library will always be buzzing with Family Place spaces, programs, and approaches to librarianship. We encourage more libraries to consider joining the Family Place Libraries coalition, too. &

For more information about Bee Cave Public Library, visit www.beecavelibrary.com and check out our social media on Instagram, @beecavelibrary. For more information about Family Place Libraries, visit www.familyplacelibraries.org.

PEER-REVIEWED

How Far…or Not…Have We Come?

Gender Portrayals in Award-Winning Children's Picture Books: 2018–2022

JESSICA HALE

Stories have always been a means for perpetuating the fundamental cultural values and myths. Stories have also been a stimulus for fantasy imagination and achievement. Books could develop this latter quality to encourage the imagination and creativity of all children. This would provide an important implementation of the growing demand for both girls and boys to have a real opportunity to fulfill their human potential.[1]

This quote from the end of the hallmark study *Sex-Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children* (1972) was an assertion of the power of stories on the lives of children and a call for different stories—ones with fair representation for women and the eradication of harmfully rigid gender stereotypes. More than fifty years have passed since the publication of this seminal work, and it is now widely acknowledged that "children's books reflect cultural values and are an important instrument for persuading children to accept those values."[2]

Picture books are of particular concern because they are most popular with children who are in the initial stages of gender identity formation. According to researchers Gooden and Gooden, "Around age five, children start to model the behaviors of adults, becoming more independent and develop their identities."[3] As such, picture books play a key role in gender socialization. Gender itself is a social construct which has historically been depicted as a binary concept in the United States—differentiating what is feminine from what is masculine. However, there is increasing recognition that gender is more fluid and that gender nonconforming identities exist.[4] Picture books are uniquely poised to reflect gender presentations in society because not only do they incorporate verbal textual clues, but also visual clues that indicate sex characteristics as well as clothing and other physical identifiers that are considered feminine or masculine. These multifaceted presentations of gender are potent for the reader, but have historically been rife with stereotypes and inequity.

Gender Roles and Traits

In Weitzman et al.'s aforementioned hallmark study, researchers found meaningful differences in how often males and females were presented in children's books, as well as differences in how they were portrayed. Males were more likely to be featured in titles and illustrations as well as appear in central roles as the subject of stories.[5]

Weitzman et al. also noted that males were more likely to be shown in the public sphere (outdoors) engaged in leadership or rescuing activities. Females, on the other hand, were more often presented indoors, in the private sphere, where they are "pleasing and helping"[6] rather than engaging in activities that require

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"intellectual or creative success" or "independence and self-confidence."[7]

When they examined traits in adults, these differences were even more profound. Females were presented almost exclusively in service roles: in fact, they found that "in most stories, the sole adult woman is identified only as a mother or wife."[8] Adult males, on the other hand, were depicted in a wide variety of roles and in occupations. These differences were true across all book series they reviewed (Caldecott winners and honorees, Newbery award winners, Little Golden Books, and etiquette books).

Weitzman et al. concluded that these gendered portrayals of service and leadership were harmful to the identity development of both boys and girls and portend "disappointment and discontent" when it comes to expectations of marriage, parenting, and aspirations. While little attention was given to characters with indeterminate gender, Weitzman et al. did highlight the idea that children may have an easier time identifying with role models that are "less differentiated and less stereotypical."[9]

In the fifty years since Weitzman et al.'s study was published, many researchers have added to our knowledge of how gender is portrayed in children's picture books. Some of the more recent and relevant work for this study came from Gooden and Gooden, who demonstrated continued gender disparity in terms of occupation and role;[10] Clark et al., who found fluctuations in gender trait stereotyping from the 1930s-1960s;[11] and Hamilton et al., who found continued inequities in gender portrayals in the 1980s and 1990s.[12]

In 2001, Gooden and Gooden set out to assess improvements in gender equity in children's picture books. Comparing their findings with those of LaDow,[13] researchers examined female stereotyping, not only in central characters, but also illustrations. While they found improvement (gender equity) in regards to central characters, males were still illustrated more frequently than females and in a wider range of roles. Despite being published almost two decades after Weitzman's study, adult females were still most frequently pictured in roles like "mother, grandmother, washer-woman, etc."[14] Further, they noted that "males were seldom seen caring for the children or grocery shopping and never seen doing household chores."[15] No analysis of the roles of gender "neutral" characters was provided, although they were included in the illustration totals.

In their study, Clark et al. examined Caldecott winners and honorees from the 1930s to the 1960s for patterns in gender representation and stereotyping. Building on the idea that gender portrayal in picture books is related to larger cultural trends in American society, the researchers sought to determine if changes in representation and traits across decades would reflect increased visibility and less stereotyping of women.

Researchers hypothesized that female characters would be depicted as more dependent, cooperative, submissive, imitative, nurturant, emotional, and passive than male characters, who would be more likely to be depicted as independent, competitive, directive, persistent, explorative, creative, aggressive, and active. While they did observe "a long-term trend toward the increasing visibility of female characters and decreasing gender stereotypes," there were still traits more commonly associated with females and males.[16] In the 1930s, thirteen of fifteen traits were presented in stereotypical ways. In the 1940s, twelve of the fifteen traits were presented in stereotypical ways. In the 1950s, nine of the fifteen traits were presented in stereotypical ways, and in the 1960s, five presented in stereotypical ways.[17]

The difference between males and females for some traits rose to statistical significance in different decades, including dependent and nurturant behaviors in females as well as persistent and explorative behaviors in males. In the conclusion of their study, Clark et al. noted that the variations in gender stereotyping observed may reflect the relative status of women in each decade. There was no mention of characters whose gender was not discernable or non-gender conforming in the analysis.

In a later study, Hamilton et al. analyzed gender representation and characters' behaviors (occupation and activity), setting (indoor/outdoor), and personality portrayal in award-winning and popular books from 1995 to 2001 and compared their findings to trends spotted in 1980s and 1990s. Once again, they found that females were pictured more frequently than males in nurturing or caring roles and indoors.

Across book series, female characters were "significantly more likely to show no evidence of an occupation outside the home" and if they were pictured outside the home, it was in a traditional occupation (teacher, stewardess, librarian, maid, nanny, nurse, dancer, etc.).[18] When they compared their findings to studies done in the 1980s, they noted that unlike other traits, which seemed to be

leveling out, stereotypes around female nurturing behaviors were increasing. Characters determined to be "gender-neutral" characters were excluded from analysis because "there were so few."[19]

The Societal Effects of Gendering Nurturing and Leadership Behaviors

As indicated by Gooden and Gooden, in the conclusion of their study, "Children's choices of what they want to become or accomplish is limited by stereotypes."[20] Internalized stereotypes related to nurturing and leadership may be particularly harmful because they limit the ways in which people show up in the public sphere. Children who grow up with these perceptions may end up perpetuating a cycle of inequity.

In society at large, gender disparities related to nurturing play out in the American workforce. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, women's participation in the labor force is less than men's (56.2 percent and 67.7 percent, respectively) and this difference is attributed in part to having young children. While having children affects the labor participation rate for both males and females, the participation rate for mothers varied considerably by the age of her children.[21] This suggests that more women than men are staying home, out of the workforce, to take on more parental duties, especially when children are young. A Pew Research Center report focused on perceptions of "who shoulders more of the burden" reported that women believed they carried a "much heavier burden than their spouse or partners," for both childcare and housework.[22]

These internalized beliefs about nurturing are reflected in occupations women select. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2020, women accounted for more than half of all workers in education and health services (74.6 percent), "other" services* (52.6 percent), and leisure and hospitality (50.4 percent). Women are 97.4 percent of registered nurses and 79.6 percent of elementary and middle school teachers, but only 29.3 percent of chief executives and 37.4 percent of lawyers. These numbers indicate that women are also disproportionally represented in career sectors related to nurturing.

In terms of leadership roles, in both corporations and politics, males still vastly outnumber females. A recent study by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.org, which surveyed 40,000 employees from 333 organizations collectively responsible for employing over 12 million people, found that "only one in four C-suite executives is a woman" and that for "every 100 men promoted from entry level to manager, only eighty-seven women are promoted."[23]

In politics, women leaders are also still underrepresented. For example, as of January 2023, women will make up 28 percent of all the US Congress members—a historic high.[24] Further, for the first time since our nation's birth, a female vice-president of the United States, Kamala Harris, was elected into office and began her term in 2021.[25] Historically, there has been very little visibility for nonbinary and trans people in politics as well.[26]

The unequal representation of females and non-gender conforming individuals in leadership, almost certainly plays a role in the continued privilege of males when it comes to societal rights. Despite ongoing public support,[27] the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would "end the legal distinctions between men and women in terms of divorce, property, employment, and other matters," has yet to be ratified.[28]

Further, in June 2022, the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, ending nearly a half-century of federally ensured reproductive rights for women that enabled women to make decisions about their family, relationship, and bodily autonomy.[29] According to a report from the Pew Research Center, 57 percent of Americans "disapprove of the court's sweeping decision."[30] Public support for the rights of gender nonconforming individuals,[31] also seems at odds with the legislative measures initiated by lawmakers in several states to restrict their access to sports teams, bathrooms that align with their gender identify as well as limiting access to gender affirming medical care.[32] This dearth of representative leadership is a problem that needs to be addressed.

The Current Study

Despite improvements, societal gender inequities still exist. Women continue to be stereotyped and underrepresented, while

* Including as private households, personal and laundry services, membership associations and organizations, repair and maintenance services.

nonbinary and transgender persons are often erased (a problem made more complex by the fact the tools traditionally used as societal indicators do not account for gender in favor of biological sex). For equity-minded individuals, the question remains: Are children still being socialized to believe that nurturing is a female quality? Do messages that reinforce the idea that leadership is a masculine trait still exist? Are occupations still being depicted as gendered?

The focus of the current study will be to assess gender depictions (traits and occupations) in award-winning books and runners-up from 2018 to 2022 to better understand the landscape of gender depictions in our current societal context. Caldecott winners and honorees, as well as Kids' Book Choice winners and finalists will be examined. This selection will highlight any differences between books chosen by adults and those chosen (in part) by children.

In general, book awards were set up to improve quality in children's publishing.[33] While these standards have historically been disproportionately filled with "white privilege and heteronormativity," there is recognition that awards are responding to "pressures of pluralism and fair social representation."[34] Among this pool of books are the stories that feature people of color and historic socio/political events, like the civil rights movement, the Black Lives Matters movement, the Tulsa Race Massacre, the Standing Rock Water Protectors, increased LGBTAQ+ visibility, and even the Vietnam War. These stories signify an important shift toward inclusion and honor increasingly diverse stories, ones in which characters' identities are multifaceted—including aspects of class, race/ethnicity, gender, nationality, and/or sexuality. However, despite this progress, gender stereotypes should not be ignored, and will be the focus of this study.

In terms of gender depictions, are stereotypes, which can limit a person's engagement with the public sphere, still at play in these picture books? Specific research questions include the following:

1. Are nurturing behaviors more commonly observed in protagonists of one gender than another?

2. Are leadership behaviors more commonly observed in protagonists of one gender than another?

3. Are there gender inequities in the portrayals of adults in occupations (i.e., for those who work outside of the home), and in what field do they work?

Method

This study will review both Caldecott and Kids' Book Choice winners (Kindergarten-Second Grade Book of the Year) and runners-up (twenty-four and twenty-nine books, respectively) from 2018 to 2022. The Caldecott Award is one of the most coveted prizes in illustrated children's books, and the selected texts are featured widely in classrooms, libraries, and bestseller lists. The annual winners and honorees are decided upon by a committee of Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) members who are believed to be both experienced in textual evaluation as well as responsive to larger social trends.[35]

Winners and finalists of the Kids' Book Choice Awards, on the other hand, are selected by children via a voting process.[36] The Children's Book Council, in partnership with the International Library Association, works with teachers and librarians throughout the US to incorporate new trade-publications into classroom activities.[37] Children vote on which texts they like best in a range of categories, including Book of the Year for kindergarten to second grade, which was used in this study. As a result, this award is more likely than any other to reflect children's values, adult involvement notwithstanding.

Four books appeared on both lists: *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Michaela Goade (Roaring Brook, 2020), *Watercress* by Andrea Wang and illustrated by Jason Chin (Holiday House, 2021), *Bear Came Along* by Richard Morris and illustrated by LeUyen Pham (Little, Brown, 2019), and *Mel Fell* by Corey Tabor (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins, 2021). As a result, the total number of books is listed as forty-nine when comparing across series (so as not to double count any titles). When comparing book series, books that fell into both categories were counted in each of their respective categories.

Coding Gender

Pronouns, verbal clues, and clues related to clothing and sex characteristics (e.g., body shape and facial features) were used to identify gender. However, in cases of ambiguity, author's notes and publisher information were also consulted to provide gender clues. Gender was coded as female, male, gender nonconforming, or indeterminate. While other researchers excluded some animal characters from analysis based on context, all animal characters were included in the following analysis.

Gender Trait Portrayal

Both nurturing behaviors and leadership behaviors may shape how citizens behave socially in the workforce, corporate and political leadership roles, and the media. As such, this study sought to examine current nurturing and leadership behaviors, as portrayed by the protagonist, for evidence of gender inequities. Books in which a single character protagonist did not exist (in text or illustration) and participatory books (in which the reader is the protagonist) were excluded. When it was difficult to identify the protagonist, the protagonist was determined to be the character from whose perspective the story was told or where the action in the story originated, e.g., *Wonder Walkers* by Micha Archer (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2021) and *The Perfect Sofa* by Fifi Kuo (Little Bee, 2019).

Nurturing

For the purposes of this study, nurturing behaviors are defined using the definition of "nurturant" employed by Clark et al. from Albert Davis. Specifically, "Giving physical or emotional aid, support, or comfort to another; demonstrating affection or compassion for another."[38] The text and illustrations were analyzed for evidence of the protagonist engaging in nurturing behaviors. If these behaviors were observed, protagonists were coded "Yes" for the variable "Nurturing." If not, they were coded "No."

Leadership

This study defined leadership behaviors as "guiding, leading, impelling others toward an action or goal; controlling behaviors of others," the definition of "directive" behaviors identified by Davis[39] and used by Clark et al. Text and illustrations were analyzed for evidence of the protagonist engaging in these behaviors. If leadership behaviors were observed, protagonists were coded "yes" for the variable "leadership." If not, they were coded "no."

Adult Role Models: Occupation

In their study, Weitzman et al. noted the importance of "adult role models" who function to demonstrate to children "what will be expected of them when they grow older."[40] Building on the work done by Hamilton et al., this study analyzed the spaces held by the adult role models in terms of occupation. Occupation was defined as any work for pay outside the home and specific occupational fields were tracked to analyze any gender related patterns. Any book featuring an adult character who appeared in text, illustration, or storyline was included in the analysis. Each book was coded to indicate if any adult characters had an occupation outside of the home ("Yes"/"No") and if so, the gender of that character was recorded (female, male, gender nonconforming, and indeterminate). Then, the researcher noted the occupational roles of the characters and made general observations about the variety of occupations and alignment with traditional vs. non-traditional gender depictions.

Results

For each research question, frequency data was calculated and reported. Ratios and percentages were also presented, where appropriate, to aid in comparison or reader conceptualization. Differences between book series were also reported in table form.

Question 1

The first research question explored gendered depictions of nurturing. Results showed that in the forty-one books with single character protagonists, females were more often pictured in nurturing behaviors than in any other gender category (male, gender nonconforming, indeterminate). While female protagonists engaged in nurturing behaviors in fourteen books, males were depicted as nurturing in ten books (a 1.4:1 ratio). Protagonists with indeterminate gender were featured nurturing in two books and there were no examples of gender nonconforming protagonists engaged in nurturing. Female protagonists engaged in nurturing behaviors were presented more frequently in Caldecott books than books from the Kids' Choice series, but males were also more likely to be nurturing in Caldecott winners and honorees (see table 1).

Question 2

The second research question explored gendered depictions of leadership. Results showed that in the forty-one books with single character protagonists, males were more often pictured in leadership behaviors than in any other gender category (female, gender nonconforming, indeterminate). Whereas male protagonists engaged in leadership behaviors in nine books, females were depicted in leadership behaviors in eight books (a 1.13:1 ratio). Protagonists with indeterminate gender were featured in three books and there were no examples of gender nonconforming protagonists engaged in leadership. While male protagonists were more likely to exhibit leadership behaviors in Kids' Choice books, female protagonists were more often depicted engaged in leadership behaviors in Caldecott books (see table 2).

Question 3

The third research question sought to uncover gender inequalities in the portrayals of adults in occupations (i.e., who work outside of the home and in what field). Results showed that twenty-one books included depictions of adults in occupations (approximately 43 percent of the forty-nine books examined). Males were most often featured in occupations (eighteen books), followed by females (fourteen books), gender nonconforming adults (one book), and indeterminate adults (one book). Males were depicted with a wider variety of occupations than females (e.g., farmer, educator, police officer, businessman, sailor, fisherman, barber, janitor, soldier, lawyer, philanthropist, doctor, pilot, construction worker, postman, vendor, athlete, artist, academic, lighthouse keeper, driver, and musician) and more often in leadership roles (e.g., politician, president, judge, minister, captain, governor, civil rights leader). In twelve of the fifteen books in which women were depicted in occupations, at least one female was presented in a traditional career (teacher, maid, dancer, singer, hairdresser, seamstress, caregiver, sales person, retail worker, and baker/cook). However, some books also pictured females in non-traditional careers such as astronaut, anthropologist, athlete, pilot, police officer, doctor, poet, and artist. In two instances, adult women were presented in leadership roles (minister and mayor). Both the gender nonconforming adult and the indeterminate gendered adult are shown working in shops/retail. In terms of occupations by series and gender, Caldecott books were more likely to present adults in occupations than Kids' Choice books, and both series were more likely to present males than any other gender category (see table 3).

Discussion

The results of this study show continued inequalities in gender trait portrayals across book series. Gendered stereotypes around nurturing and leadership were still present and women still appear to be overrepresented in traditional occupational fields. However, the findings in this study are limited because they cannot be directly compared to previous works due to methodological differences and insufficient coding details. Further, the small sample size negated the use of inferential statistics. Finally, as a single researcher, it was impossible to establish interrater reliability, the results of which would have lent additional strength to findings.

Like previous research on gender trait portrayals, this study showed female protagonists were most frequently presented engaging in nurturing behaviors. Books like *Wolf in the Snow* by Matthew Cordell (Feiwel and Friends/Macmillan, 2017), in which a girl rescues a wolf cub and returns it to its family, and *Thank You, Omu!* by Oge Mora (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers/Hachette, 2018), in which an older woman feeds her community from her own soup pot, typify female nurturing behaviors.

However, there are also several books that provide examples of males engaged in nurturing. In *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi and illustrated by Thi Bui (Capstone Young Readers/Capstone, 2017), the protagonist helps his father catch a fish and then helps his mother prepare it so that the family will have food for dinner. In *The Cat Man of Aleppo* by Irene Latham and Karim Shamsi-Basha and illustrated by Yuko Shimizu (Putnam, 2020), the protagonist is not only an ambulance driver who stays in Aleppo to help save lives, but also nurtures the cats left homeless and starving in the wake of the bombing and goes on to care for other animals as well as his community at large.

In *Hello Lighthouse!* by Sophie Blackall (Little, Brown, 2018), the lighthouse keeper comforts his wife as she delivers their baby and is pictured holding the infant and gazing at her lovingly while his wife rests and recovers. In *The Rough Patch* by Brian Lies (Greenwillow/HarperCollins, 2018), the protagonist not only demonstrates affection for his dog, but is also depicted comforting him as he dies. So, while Hamilton et al. found that female main characters were three times more likely to be performing nurturing behaviors, the gender disparity was smaller in this study (a female to male ration of 1.4:1), suggesting improvement.

Also of note is that the books children chose for themselves (Kids' Choice Award winners and runners-up) depicted female protagonists in nurturing roles less frequently and with more parity between males and females, than Caldecott books (six protagonists compared to ten; a female to male ratio of 1.5:1 versus 1.67:1). This might suggest that children are attracted to stories with less bias when it comes to nurturing, identifying with both females and males in nurturing roles. There is evidence that there is an increase in the number of "stay-at-home" dads in the United States[41] and this phenomenon may also explain, in part, why children were attracted to books that depicted more equitable nurturing behaviors—they are living that reality at home.

Table 1. Nurturing Behaviors in Protagonists by Gender and Book Series

Protagonist Nurturing Behavior	Caldecott Books Winners and Honorees (n=22)	Kids' Choice Books Winners and Runners-Up (n=23)
Male	6	4
Female	10	6
Gender Nonconforming	0	0
Gender Indeterminate	1	1

Table 2. Leadership Behaviors in Protagonists by Gender and Book Series

Protagonist Leadership Behavior	Caldecott Books Winners and Honorees (n=11)	Kids' Choice Books Winners and Runners-Up (n=11)
Male	4	5
Female	6	4
Gender Nonconforming	0	0
Gender Indeterminate	1	2

Table 3. Depictions of Adults in Occupations by Gender and Book Series

Depictions of Adults in Occupations	Caldecott Books Winners and Honorees (n= 12)	Kids' Choice Books Winners and Runners-Up (n= 9)
Male	11	7
Female	8	6
Gender Nonconforming	0	1
Gender Indeterminate	0	1

*Note: Several books depicted multiple genders in occupations.

In this study, males were depicted in leadership behaviors more often than any other gender category. *The Cat Man of Aleppo* by Irene Latham and Karim Shamsi-Basha and illustrated by Yuko Shimizu (Putnam, 2020) is a prime example of a text with a male protagonist engaged in leadership behaviors—he organizes his community (neighbors and volunteers) in support of the cats as well as other causes. In an example, *Day at the Beach* by Tom Booth (Aladdin, 2018), Gideon, a young boy learns an important lesson, when he tries to control the behavior of his little sister, excluding her from building their annual sand castle. He discovers that while his goal of "the most stupendous sand castle" was realized, the act of doing it "together" is more valuable.

However, when compared to Weitzman et al.'s Caldecott data from 1967 to 1972, which reported the ratio of males to females in leadership functions as 3:2 (i.e., 1.5:1) for children and 5:0 for adults, the ratio found in this study (1.13:1) signifies significant progress.

While the number of females and males engaged in leadership behaviors was very close in both book series, it is worthy to note that Caldecott winners and honorees were more likely to show females in leadership than any other gender group. Books exemplifying female protagonists engaged in leadership behaviors include *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Michaela Goade (Roaring Brook, 2020), in which the protagonist leads her community to activism to protect the planet, *Mel Fell* by Corey Tabor (Balzer + Bray, 2021), in which Mel, a young Kingfisher, is the first of her siblings to leave the nest and try to fly, and the young female protagonist

in *Over the Shop* by JonArno Lawson and illustrated by Qin Leng (Candlewick, 2021), who shows leadership by advocating on behalf of an LGBTAQ+ couple after they are unfairly discriminated against by her grandparent.

This study made clear that occupational stereotyping has not disappeared. Adult males were more frequently shown in occupations than any other gender category. This was true for both book series. Males were also depicted in a wider range of roles, whereas women were more likely to appear in traditional career fields. For example, females were depicted as teachers in a number of texts (*Nina* by Traci N. Todd and illustrated by Christian Robinson (Putnam, 2021); *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James (Agate/Bolden, 2017); *Double Bass Blues* by Andrea J. Loney and illustrated by Rudy Gutierrez (Knopf, 2019); and *Going Down Home with Daddy* by Kelly Starling Lyons and illustrated by Daniel Minter (Peachtree, 2019). This occupational disparity, however, somewhat mirrors the current distribution of women in the workforce.

To see more gender equity in the workforce and occupations, children will need to be able to "see" themselves in those roles. It's clear that women no longer solely exist in children's picture books as simply "a mother or a wife" as Weitzman et al. originally observed, but it's also clear that there is much work to be done if we want to see equity in occupation portrayals. This study did find a few instances in which adult women were depicted in nontraditional gender roles, and two stand-out examples include *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander and illustrated by Kadir Nelson (Versify, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), which features black women in occupations such as anthropologist, professional athlete, Olympian, and poet, as well as *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart* by Zetta Elliott and illustrated by Noa Denmon (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2020), that features Mae Carol Jemison, the first black astronaut, and Maya Angelou, poet, scholar, and civil rights activist. While these depictions are only in illustration, the appearance of women in these nontraditional roles is an indicator that we are moving, albeit slowly, in a more equitable direction.

Unfortunately, the sample in this study provided very limited presentations of gender nonconforming and indeterminate characters, so no meaningful conclusions can be made about gender trait portrayal for these groups. However, these texts are significant in that they highlight a space ignored in previous similar studies—a non-binary view of gender. *Julián Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love (Candlewick, 2018) tells the story of a young boy who comes out to his abeula as gender nonconforming. While Julián (the protagonist) doesn't engage in nurturing or leadership behaviors, this story is a beautiful example of a child with the awareness that gender isn't binary. In *I Am Love: A Book of Compassion,* by Susan Verde and illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds (Abrams, 2019), the protagonist is gender indeterminate, illustrated with medium length blue and pink hair, no clear sex characteristics, and gender-neutral clothing. This character presents nurturing through acts of compassion, tenderness, listening, and physical affection, among others.

In *Big Cat, Little Cat* by Elisha Cooper (Roaring Brook, 2017), the gender indeterminate protagonist (the cat whose lifespan is followed in the text) is depicted in nurturing behaviors, e.g., showing a new kitten, "When to eat, when to drink, where to go, how to be, when to rest." In *I Am a Tiger* by Karl Newson and illustrated by Ross Collins (Scholastic, 2019), the protagonist, a gender indeterminate mouse, asserts its own identity (as a tiger and then a crocodile), and compels others to accept it as well. The final example worth noting is *Over the Shop* by JonArno Lawson and illustrated by Qin Leng (Candlewick, 2021). While the protagonist of this book presented as female, her guardian presents with a gender nonconforming identity and is shown in a retail occupation as well as in the capacity of a landlord.

Overall, this study confirms, and builds upon, previous studies showing that inequities in gender depictions still exist in picture books. As these books are tools of socialization, the underrepresentation of females and gender nonconforming individuals, and stereotypical gender depictions, are harmful and legitimize gender inequality.

Tsao reviewed existing literature to summarize both the current state of gender bias and stereotypes in children's literature as well as trends relating to how men and women were represented in pictures, titles, and central characters.[42] Tsao highlighted the fact that while researchers know gender portrayals in children's picture books influence their audiences, "the magnitude and generalization of this influence and its impact on behavior are not completely understood."[43] Tsao noted that "a negative portrayal of a child's own gender may affect a child's self-identity and self-esteem," but went on to present studies that suggest these negative effects can be ameliorated.[44] Highlighting work done Narahara[45] and Trepanier-Street and Romantowski,[46] Tsao identified evidence that "sustained, focused, and intensive" interventions (like exposure to non-sexist books, books that push back on gender discrimination, and books that promote gender-neutral attitudes) could reduce gender-role stereotypes, rigid adherence to gender roles, and result in fewer stereotypical attitudes about jobs.[47] Tsao's analysis ended with a call for teachers, authors, and publishers to "provide children with literature that more closely parallels the roles males and females play in contemporary society."[48]

The interventions Tsao highlights are important for educators at all levels. While some of the effects of the gendered messaging children receive throughout their K-12 education may be apparent early on, other effects may not present until these emerging adults must make decisions about continuing their education or pursuing careers. The effects of rigid gender roles and stereotypical attitudes about jobs are likely to emerge at this time, making this an issue of particular importance for higher education.

The books explored in this study will, in some part, direct the attitudes and behavior of college students more than ten years from now. If more work isn't done to reduce rigid gender roles and address underrepresentation, these books may contribute to another generation of women who do not pursue nontraditional careers.

Future researchers should continue to look for evidence of inequities in gender depictions in other book series. Caldecott and Kids' Choice winners and runners-up are only a small subsection of the books available for children. Further, a trend analysis or gendered traits spanning the last two decades would bring the work done by Hamilton et al. up to date and clarify the pattern of social conflict as it relates to gender portrayals. More research also needs to be done to better understand where trait equity is being achieved in children's books and where gaps still exist. The storylines of these texts should also undergo content analysis to identify larger gendered themes. Researchers should seek to examine how often modern children's books show males and females in non-traditional occupations and what interventions can be done at the college level to address career related gender bias and stereotypes. Finally, research into how class and race intersect with gender roles should also be explored.

In conclusion, recent children's picture books continue to include some stereotypical portrayals of males and females in regards to nurturing, leadership, and occupations. These depictions connect to larger, problematic societal trends, which also need to be addressed. That said, there does appear to be more parity in how genders are depicted when it comes to nurturing and leadership than in the past. As these traits play a role in how individuals choose to engage in the public sphere (i.e. workforce), it is important that we continue to show females as leaders and males as nurturers. As children's books play an important role in gender socialization, it is imperative that increased equality is visible for this generation, or the problems we see today will continue to exist decades into the future. &

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Couples who Collaborate

Tony and Angela DiTerlizzi

MARY-KATE SABLESKI

If you are feeling a bit cranky, the best antidote might be reading Angela and Tony DiTerlizzi's hilarious picture book, *A Very Cranky Book* (Quill Tree, 2023). The first official collaboration from this mega-creative couple, this is a comedic look at a book feeling just a bit "cranky." Inspirational, funny, and creative, Angela and Tony DiTerlizzi are just getting started with their book collaborations.

Tony DiTerlizzi is the creator of the Caldecott Honor-winning *The Spider and the Fly* (2002), as well as the bestselling *Spiderwick Chronicles*, created with Holly Black, to name just a couple highlights of his successful career. Tony began creating art for *Magic: The Gathering* and *Dungeons & Dragons*, eventually achieving his dream of becoming a children's book creator with his first book, *Jimmy Zangwow's Out-of-This-World Moon Pie Adventure* (2000).

Angela DiTerlizzi is the author of picture books *Some Bugs* (2014) and *The Magical Yet* (2020), among many others. Angela began her career as a makeup artist for productions such as *The Today Show* and *Saturday Night Live*, and then found her calling as an artist and an author.

Angela and Tony live in New York City with their daughter, Sophie. As our newest couple who collaborate, they offer a model of a collaborative relationship that seamlessly crosses both professional and personal lines with ease.

Q: How did you begin working on books together?

Tony: Well, *The Cranky Book* was actually not our first collaboration. Angela has been with me since before I started making children's books. She always had input and thoughts, and helped me and supported me, long before my first book was published.

I worked for Dungeons and Dragons and Magic: The Gathering all through the nineties, with big dreams and aspirations to one day illustrate children's books. When Ange and I first met and started dating, she noticed a poster I had hanging in my bathroom. It was a promotional poster I found for *Bently and Egg* by William Joyce. I told her how I would love to be able to illustrate like that someday.

Ange said, "All right. Well, let's figure out how to get you there." That is how she is—resourceful, determined, strong, and supportive. Those are her superpowers. Eventually, we decided to move to New York. Angela began as a makeup artist. She worked for NBC; I continued to work for Dungeons and Dragons and Magic: The Gathering while trying to make some kind of inroad at the big publishers. I was not making much headway, until a representative for Scholastic Book Fairs showed up in Ange's makeup chair.

Mary-Kate Sableski *is an Associate Professor at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio, where she teaches children's literature and literacy methods courses.*

Angela: Yes! Prior to working at *Saturday Night Live* and the *Today Show*, I worked for a company called Mac Cosmetics in Soho, in New York. I had a woman come, and she was going to be with me for about an hour and a half to have her makeup done. She had a tote bag from Scholastic. I took that hour and a half to tell her all about Tony, and that he was an aspiring author/illustrator. She gave me her business card, maybe to get me off her back a little bit. She said, "Yeah, sure, have him contact me."

Tony: Didn't you do the makeup on one eye, and you said, "I can do the other eye, but it's going to cost you?"

Angela: Yes, the negotiation tactic! Immediately, I called Tony, and he contacted her that day. He ended up meeting his editor, Kevin Lewis, who edited the Spiderwick Chronicles, among many other books by Tony. Really, even that moment was a collaboration of us saying, "Okay, I've got the ball. I'm handing it to you. Run it into the end zone." We've been together for thirty years, and that is pretty much how we do it every time, whether he's teeing it up or I am. We both take the ball and run with it.

Interior illustration from *A Very Cranky Book* by Angela DiTerlizzi, illustrated by Tony DiTerlizzi (Quill Tree, 2023). Used with permission.

Tony: I am very blessed that Ange has supported me all these years. I was the kid who always drew in the back of the classroom. I drew from kindergarten all the way through high school, and I did not really know what to do with that skill. My senior year of high school, I had a semester long project with my art teacher, in which he wanted me to come up with an amazing portfolio piece to try to get into art school. I did not know what to do, but my brother, who's nine years younger than me, was reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for a class assignment. I forgot how much I loved that story! I came back to school and said, I want to try illustrating *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* My art teacher told me it was a great project, but said I would need to redesign all the characters, and, by the way, the sketches are due this week. That was basically a truncated version of what my life would become as a children's book creator. The fact that I finished this book, this version of *Alice in Wonderland* and all my peers loved it, I just felt like I got this validation in the microcosm of high school that I so desperately needed. It was like the universe telling me this is what you should do. I was reminded of that point in my life, for me it was about fifth/sixth grade, where I went from reading books, not because I had to, but because I wanted to read them. I wondered if I could make books for that sweet spot, where reading is not necessarily an assignment, but something you do because your friends are reading a book, or people are talking about a book, or even your parents have read the book. And that set me on that trajectory, but I didn't know how to get there. Thankfully, I met Angie, and she was able to help me get there. That was a big part of my journey.

Angela: I was the theater kid. I was the kid who was in the chorus. I was the kid who loved doing makeup, but I never saw myself as an artist. No one ever said, you are an artist. It was not until I met Tony that I realized, there's someone like me, who has creativity. It finds itself in many forms, whether making puppets or doing makeup, or writing poetry. All of a sudden, I started to form this version of myself, seeing Tony's creativity.

Tony: When I look back there's a constellation of people in my life that helped me at pivotal points. I grew up in a creative household where my parents were very encouraging. I didn't feel self-conscious about being artsy at home. At school it was a little different, but at home, in that safe space I felt I could be as crafty as I wanted. But you need it validated from the outside world as well to continue on the path.

Angela: In high school, we had an assignment to write a poem. My teacher returned everyone else's assignments except for mine and called me up to her desk. She said, "You've got an amazing talent. You should keep writing." I didn't hear it then, but I hear it now as an adult. I got this affirmation that I was not really ready to recognize at the time, but now, thirty-five years later, it resonates with me, and I still hear her voice.

Q: Can you tell us about your process of creating books together?

Tony: Well, it is pretty simple. I will read aloud her latest picture book manuscript and tell her I would love to illustrate it, and she'll say, "No, this one's not for you." She just keeps me circling the hook until she finds the one she might let me illustrate. She literally did a book about bugs (*Some Bugs*), and I am obsessed with insects, and she said, "Yeah, this one's not for you." I looked at her and said, "But, it's bugs!"

Angela: I think that goes to the fact, although I do not paint and draw, I am so visual in that way. So, when I write, I do get a mental picture of what I think the final book could look like. Tony is just so beautifully detailed and precise and meticulous in all of his work. And for *Some Bugs* I just felt it was not a match. The book needed to be colorful and inviting—more like Eric Carle. I found the work of Brendan Wenzel and brought him into the publisher,

and said, this is the guy. I think that speaks a lot about our relationship.

Tony: That was a big thing for you early on. You saw how hard it was for me to break in. So, your big thing for many years was to find an unknown illustrator and try to help them get that break into children's publishing that was so difficult to find. In this field, an author saying, "I really want this artist," that can have a lot of sway with the editor and the art director. You do not always get it, but you did a lot of times.

Angela: Absolutely. I love working with new talent, because at one point we were both new talents.

Tony: And the great thing is, we still work together on the book behind the scenes. We work together at every stage of the book making process, whether we have our names on the book or not. That is just how we have always done it.

Angela: We see the whole picture, really.

Tony: An editor is dealing with multiple book projects at a time, but for us, our book is our main focus for months and months at a time.

Angela: We think about the book holistically. And, our careers for that matter. We have the perspective of being together for thirty years. We think about this in terms of, what does a thirty-year relationship look like, and what does a thirty-year career look like, you know?

Tony: Our stories are grilled, cooked, burnt, remade many times over before they even get to the editor.

Angela: In terms of *The Cranky Book,* this was a manuscript I came up with over COVID. We were thinking a lot about feelings. Obviously, we were all having discussions about how we were feeling during this difficult, unprecedented time. For me, I started thinking about Pixar movies. I was thinking, "Fish have feelings and cars have feelings, and, feelings have feelings." I remember one day looking at the bookshelf, and thinking, "What if books had feelings?"

I started on this manuscript, and I would sit at the table every morning and read a bit to Tony back and forth. He would start sketching, and I would say, no, that is not what he looks like. One day, I ran into the library, and I grabbed a book off the shelf, and I told him, "What if this is what he looks like? He's a physical book. We should photograph this, and you draw the features and then we will put them together."

Tony: I loved this, because this was so out of my wheelhouse, and that is what gets me excited. We set up a little photo shoot in the studio. We messed around with the book and just photographed it with our phone. We wondered, if we could just put it into Photoshop, and start drawing on it. That part was very organic, just playing.

Angela: And pushing ourselves right out of our comfort zones.

Tony: Absolutely. So, my art brain immediately thought alright, if we are using a photo, a real element, we could possibly photograph real elements throughout for gags or what have you, then we can contrast that with a very Crockett Johnson-like *Harold and the Purple Crayon* background. Angie liked that a lot. But, for some ideas I had, she said, no, I don't think this is quite right.

Angela: And that is collaboration, right? We end up coming up with this third thing that would not have existed had both of us not given our input into it. That is the beauty of that process. I get energy through collaboration. When you first have an idea, you are creating on your own. You have to try and keep that momentum up throughout the process. But when you are collaborating with someone, they are there to support you. There might be a day that I am not feeling as motivated, but Tony is there to lift me up, or vice versa, and that energy propels us throughout the entire process.

Q: How is it different to work with someone who is not your family member as opposed to working with each other?

Tony: I can't bend them to her will! But seriously, at a certain point, with *The Cranky Book,* I told Ange, "You see this so clearly. I will be your hands and let you make the thing you see in your head." There are plenty of books I created that look like the thing I see in my head, so I was ready to try something new, and this was it.

Angela: For me, being that we are working together, and living together, and parenting together, everything we do is collaborating in every single facet of our lives. At the end of the day, when I get sketches from another illustrator that I have never seen before, there is that moment of surprise of what it all is going to look like, whether it is what I envisioned or not. I do not get that moment with Tony, because I see it incrementally along the way. It is rewarding in a very different way. It is the ultimate trust to know he is there and always wanting what is best. We check our egos. We are best friends. We want to make the book the best possible, just as with making the best choices for our child.

Tony: We really broke it down and rebuilt it a few times, and I just kept asking her really difficult questions, and that was challenging. They were gray, where no one is quite sure of the right answer.

In an earlier version of the book, Cranky just kept getting tortured by the reader, which was funny. But I said at a certain point, "What if this was our daughter? What do we do when she is cranky? What do we do when I am cranky? Or when you are cranky?" I wanted to think about our audience as a parent reading or a teacher reading this book to kindergartners, what would they do? And Angie said, "Well, we would either ask them to take a time out, or just tell them maybe they need a little time out. And, sometimes they give themselves a timeout." So, we thought, that is what needs to happen in this story. We need to figure that out. At some point, Angie said, "But I want them to know they are still loved. That you can be cranky, but as a parent I still love you." And I told her, "That is the end of your story."

Angela: Although we were laughing at his cranky voice, it did become a conversation about social emotional learning. When I wrote *The Magical Yet*, that was really a conversation about growth mindset. I like to think about how to apply these concepts that are really so relevant to students and educators. How can I offer an opportunity to begin those important conversations with our youngest audiences?

Q: Would you describe your workspace for us?

Tony: We are in a fairly modern, new construction home that Ange found during peak Spiderwick, when I was working all of the time on the books. The house was framed out, and she said we could finish the attic or the basement for my studio. So, the art either catches on fire or gets flooded. I chose the basement because this space is unbelievable. It is a big, walk-out basement. It is kind of a weird mutation of my bedroom at ten years old, because I have to be ten so often when I am working.

There are toys, some of my actual toys. Some are recaptured toys from when I was that age. And, lots of books. Ange bought me a Pac-Man machine, and there's a pinball machine. It is a super creative space that is cluttered with toys and books and other stuff.

Angela: We have sofas down here, so we can sit and have meetings and talk about things when we need a break. He has the computer area, a drawing table, and he can step outside for a break. I have an office upstairs, two floors away, so I can also have my own space. I feel like we create in all the spaces of our home, not just one room. Sometimes, we will be in the library and set up with a laptop. Other times, we like to be in the living room or in the kitchen, with all of the hustle and bustle of the household, and our daughter and our dogs. I feel like for the most part, usually, we are together.

We have a lot of original art work from Tony and a lot of other artists whose work we love as well around the house. We have really thought about surrounding ourselves with inspiration. I think that is why we tend to kind of bop around to different places because each one of those spaces almost evokes a different energy.

Q: What has it been like to share your work with children?

Tony: One of the most rewarding aspects, other than creating, in the creative process is getting to share my stories with kids. I love seeing the work do the job that it was intended to do. When COVID happened, I did not have that opportunity. I am so happy to get back out on the road.

Angela: I write books for the six-year-old version of myself. It is so rewarding when I get to sit with children, get their feedback, and see them make the connection with the words or the illustrations.

Tony: It is very validating. You can see how all the decisions you made to create this story and do it the way you did impact people. Winning awards and being on best seller lists are great, but those things are very ephemeral compared to when you meet a child, or the parents, and the book is all beat up and the covers are taped back on, or they are dressed up as your character. That is the stuff that you really remember.

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Q: Do you have advice for couples who might be considering collaborating on books for children?

Angela: Respect one another's perspectives. And remember what causes you to want to collaborate together in the first place. This is just another facet of our lives that we collaborate in, whether I am making a meal, and we are having a conversation about how to julienne the carrots, and Tony is the sous chef, or if we are working on a picture book together, we respect one another's thoughts and opinions and strengths, and support one another in all of it.

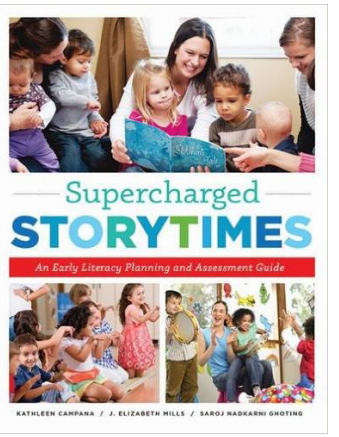
Tony: How do you separate work from life? So, if we are having a heated conversation where I say, I think *The Cranky Book* should be yellow or red, and she says, no, it is blue, it can get heated. We cannot just leave the studio with that argument, and go up to watch TV or whatever. We have to work through the issue, together.

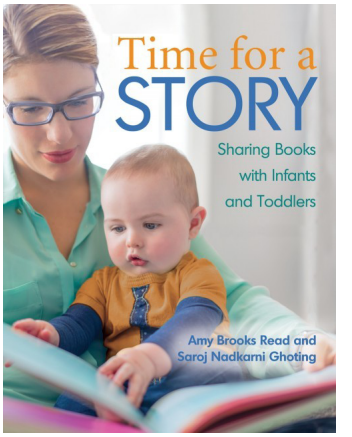
Angela: It took us a while to figure out how to separate our personal and professional lives well, and to see what those dynamics look like. Sometimes I step back and I remind myself, Tony is an artist. He is going to have a perspective. He is going to have a vision, and I respect that. Now sometimes I think that my perspective is better, or my opinion should carry more weight in this case, but figuring that out is important. And just like in this conversation, we are allowing space for both of us to have our own thoughts. What makes any relationship work? It is respect, and the ability to listen, and the desire to have someone become the best version of themselves. &

Supercharged Saroj!

Early Literacy Leader Shares Decades of Wisdom

PAMELA MARTIN-DÍAZ





Now retired, early childhood literacy consultant and national trainer and author Saroj Nadkarni Ghoting has spent decades supporting the causes dear to librarians' hearts. We thought spotlighting her long-time advocacy was well earned.

Saroj, you have always supported and promoted diversity in your work; how did this become an important value to you?

I guess you could say I was lucky! My father was from India and my mother was the daughter of orthodox Jews from Russia. So, I grew up with multiple languages and cultures in Bethesda, MD, a suburb of Washington, DC.

We spoke English at home. My father taught us Marathi before we visited India when I was 12, and my mother read us the postcards in Yiddish she received every day from her mother. Our father told us stories from his childhood, from Hindu works (*YAY! Oral storytellling!*). My mom read us picture books every day. And we always used our public libraries.

There weren't many east Indians in the US in the 1950s and 1960s. I remember when people would ask about my background, I would say I was "half Indian." People thought I was half Native American! Because of my mixed heritage, I learned to be welcoming and accepting of everyone, to see people as individuals with a story to share.

What inspired you to become a children's librarian?

After I graduated from Oberlin College (OH) with a BA in South Asian Studies, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I always liked children and thought maybe I would become an elementary school teacher. My Mom thought it might not be a good match because I tended to be bossy. After talking with some family friends who were librarians, I tried out two courses at The Catholic University of America (DC) and decided to continue to get my master's in library science to become a children's librarian.

What was your first professional job?

I didn't know it at the time, but I almost didn't get that first library job at Arundel County (MD) Public Library. The person in human resources assumed I didn't know English because of my name.

Pamela Martin-Díaz *retired from the day to-day pleasure of working with patrons in a public library in 2020. Since then, she has held workshops shaped by decades of experience as a children's librarian and branch manager. She is currently an instructor on early literacy with Library Juice Academy.*

Luckily, the branch manager knew I had applied and asked to review my application. If she hadn't known me, I never would have even gotten an interview.

And here's another twist. As part of my interview, they asked me to tell a story as if I were doing a storytime. I hadn't prepared anything. YIKES! So, I thought for a few minutes and then told a story from a Hindu epic my father had told us growing up. A couple of years later, the children's coordinator told me that the story I had chosen and the way I told it was a tipping point in my favor!

What is your favorite book to share in storytime?

Something from Nothing by Phoebe Gilman, which is based on a Jewish folktale. I love clever stories, and this one has great rhythm and repetition with lots of details in the illustrations. It also has a special connection with my mother. I showed her a flannelboard I had made from the story. While looking through the book, she noticed that on the last page the boy is writing in Yiddish! It says *epes fun gornisht* which translates to "something from nothing." From then on, I pointed this out whenever I shared the book. It added another whole dimension to the book for myself and how I shared the book.

What are the most significant changes you've noticed in children's services over the years?

It is hard to overestimate the impact of Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) for me and the profession. PLA/ALSC's parent early literacy initiative was a paradigm shift for us. It completely changed the way many of us thought about and did our work. We learned some important concepts—that early literacy, what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write—doesn't just emerge naturally. It is learned behavior which children acquire through adult interactions. Also, we learned that to make a difference in children's early literacy development, we had to reach the people who are with children every day, to help them to support their children's early literacy development. We broadened our focus to include parents and caregivers more directly.

Were there any bumps on this new road?

After seeing how adults reacted to ECRR workshops, I worried that we were losing the fun in books and that there was a danger of choosing books for their "educational value." I realized we can support early literacy development with ANY book. It's how we intentionally share books that makes the difference. So . . . HOORAY . . . I could use any and all of the fun books that children and I loved by adapting how I shared them.

We connected the research from the workshops to storytimes by sharing that information with adults through early literacy tips or asides, little bits of information. We learned how to broaden our outreach to parents and caregivers in our communities. Outreach evolved into partnerships and community engagement because when we learned the language of early learning, we were better able to advocate for quality programs for young children. We finally had a seat at the table.

How has storytime itself changed?

Even before ECRR, I noticed our storytimes were different. My first storytime experience, at the age of four, was with other kids who were starting kindergarten in the fall. Our mothers waited for us in the library while we went into the storytime area. For most of us, this was the first time we were separated from our parents and part of a group. Now more children go to preschool, so storytimes tend to skew younger; we include programs for infants, and mixed-age storytimes too. Parents and caregivers join us in storytimes, as opposed to sitting in the back of the room on chairs.

Even what we emphasize in storytime has changed. Children's attention spans are shorter than before and research has helped us understand how children learn—through repetition and interactivity. The intent became not to just expose children to books but to give them an opportunity to internalize and understand them. This resulted in changes in my storytimes. I used fewer books, gave more time to talk about what was happening in them, and making connections to children's experiences.

I repeated books in different formats, including songs, flannelboards, and activities, both within a storytime and over multiple storytimes. ECRR expanded the way I looked at literacy. I knew books lead to literacy but did not realize how important all language is to literacy—talking, singing, playing, and writing. So, all of the activities I did in storytimes became language activities in themselves, *what fun*! From loving reading to loving language!

With the second edition of ECRR, we incorporated another critical expansion in our early literacy strategies into storytimes—the new emphasis in the parent workshops on the importance of

background knowledge or world knowledge and the role it plays in a child's ability to understand what they read when they are older. We intentionally included factual books and information when sharing picture books in ways that weren't intimidating for parents. We moved from just thinking about early literacy by itself to looking at how it is a part of early learning.

How did you come to "supercharge" your storytimes?

Supercharged storytimes (SCST) was born from the VIEWS2 study, which set out to discover both the impact of incorporating early literacy skills in library storytimes and effective strategies needed to do so. Those of us already acquainted with ECRR were already emphasizing interactivity and intentionality. The biggest expansion for me was adding assessment tools.

How so?

I thought we might lose the joy and delight of storytime by assessing them. Of course, I would think about how my storytimes went in an informal way based on my own impressions, how participants reacted, and sometimes I would talk with the parents afterwards to get feedback and try to improve from there. I would also ask colleagues for input. But SCST offered much more.

As an evaluator, I preferred encouragement to a judgmental approach. I was surprised to find that more formal assessments could be encouraging and not discouragingly critical; I learned how to do assessments in constructive and meaningful ways. Supercharged storytimes gave us lots of different tools—for self-reflection, peer observation and sharing, and outcome-based processes in observing children's early literacy behaviors.

How has your relationship with technology changed over the years?

There are two areas that come to mind—research and online learning. ECRR was based on workshops which were built on research including brain development, early childhood development, and early literacy. This was an impetus for me to read research journals. Sometimes, I made too many assumptions about how the research conclusions could be applied in practice. Because of the internet, I could easily contact academic researchers and was surprised that they were very willing to explain their research to me!

The other aspect of technology which influenced me was online learning. . . it was a challenge! I was comfortable with in-person training and loved being with and talking with participants. To me, the online format felt stiff and not interactive like in-person training was. But it became more and more difficult for staff to get out of their branches for training, so Enid Costley, the youth services consultant at the state library in Virginia, convinced me to try training online. She held my hand as I learned Moodle software to develop online courses on early literacy.

This work led to the Early Childhood Literacy certificate program with Library Juice Academy, as well as the free class offered by Web Junction. I found online classes are much more in-depth and personal than the interactions I could offer in webinars. I was amazed to see the course participants learn so much that they were able to take back to their communities. By talking with library staff who had participated in both my online and in-person training, I found that each method has its strengths and both are excellent ways to keep learning.

What are your thoughts on the role of the public library today?

I have always felt that the role of the public library is to "serve all" and to make sure that we support and advocate for people who are underserved. We are the bridge for families connecting language development and research to what the schools expect. We need to be humble and open as we think about how to support and develop early literacy staff training and library programs that honor and are responsive to people's backgrounds and values. Just how we can do it is a difficult, complex question and an ongoing challenge.

Public library staff need to be advocates for young children and their families. Offering opportunities for all requires training for library staff on current research and how it applies to early literacy, early childhood development and learning, cultural awareness, assessment, and self-knowledge.

Administrators and funders must allocate resources for community partnerships, for library programs and services, and assessments. There are always children being born, new parents and caregivers, new staff members, new research, information and strategies to make a difference in the lives of our children and their parents and caregivers.

I feel fortunate to have been part of children's services in public libraries and to have worked with so many children's librarians and staff who are passionate, creative, caring, and tireless in their work to support young children and their families.

I believe children are important in and of themselves. They need us, they need adults, for support and guidance. Young children deserve our support, our advocacy, and all we can offer them. We have the power to boost a child's confidence, to spark joy and curiosity, and to offer acceptance and safety. We need to wield this noble power mindfully and unconditionally.

May you carry these thoughts with you as you embrace the joy of sharing books and nurturing children and their families. And remember never underestimate the impact you can make in the life of a child.

Saroj, thank you for talking with me today and for your decades of sharing your love of bringing libraries, families, books, and children together. You have been an inspiration for so many. &

Serving Well

Using Professional Toolkits to Fill Gaps in Service Knowledge

Anne Price

Anne Price *is the Children's Librarian at the North Platte (NE) Public Library. She has worked in youth services in rural public libraries for the last ten years, and currently serves on ALSC's Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee.*

Libraries being accessible for all is one of the core tenets of modern librarianship, but a perennial concern for all librarians is reaching and advocating for marginalized and underserved communities. There are many reasons why a segment of the community isn't using the library—from a lack of physical accessibility to not knowing what resources are offered. The following six toolkits from ALA divisions and other institutions focus on serving the needs of marginalized populations.

Autism-Ready Libraries Toolkit, https://bit.ly/3W3PRWB

A research team at the University of Washington Information School created the Autism-Ready Libraries Toolkit, which offers training modules for public library staff serving youth emphasizing adaptive and inclusive services and programs, as well as resources for identifying barriers to library use for autistic children and their families.

Learning Beyond: Twenty-First Century Summer and Out-of-School Time Programs for Youth, https://bit.ly/3wdoM99

This toolkit, completed in 2021 by the ALSC Summer-Out of School Time task force, centers on community values and equity in summer and out-of-school programming. It recognizes that not all youth come to library programming with the same skills or background. It uses that knowledge to create programming that is participant-led and focuses on STEAM learning and twenty-first century skills.

Library Accessibility Toolkit, https://bit.ly/4bg0mcj

Created by the Library Accessibility Alliance in 2020, this toolkit gathers information and publications from a variety of sources to make library materials and spaces accessible, including digital spaces. Many of us are familiar with accommodations for physical spaces, but does your website and online content have alt text or high contrast for the visually impaired? This toolkit offers not only tips for creating more inclusive digital spaces and content, but it also provides a list of online accessibility checkers and assistive technology.

Library Services to Underserved Children and Their Caregivers, https://bit.ly/3W5m2oU

Authored by the 2020-2021 Library Service to Underserved Children and Their Caregivers committee, this toolkit covers a wide variety of communities, from those who experience gaps in the digital divide, the unhoused, new citizens, and more. This toolkit includes a guide to reaching out to your target population, identifying resources, and creating partnerships that can help you reach the population on which you are trying to focus.

Open to ALL Toolkit, https://bit.ly/3WbVLoU

Created by ALA's Rainbow Round Table, this toolkit focuses on practical tips, such as addressing patrons and staff in inclusive ways, recognizing not all families look the same, nor is gender always a necessary piece of information when registering a new patron for a library card. This toolkit also includes collection development resources as well as information dealing with challenges to collections.

Serving Diverse Communities, https://bit.ly/3TULMI2

Authored by ALSC committees and curated by the Public Awareness and Advocacy committee, this toolkit offers resources for building diverse collections, protecting vulnerable populations, and understanding privilege. The toolkit includes archived keynote speakers from previous ALSC Institutes and resources from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). &

Visit the newly updated ALSC website (www.ala.org/alsc) for more toolkits and other advocacy resources.

It's Professional Awards Season!

This Fall ALSC members have the opportunity to research, discover, and celebrate one another through the ALSC Professional Recognition Awards. Applications are open now!

Do you love children's literature and researching? The Louise Seaman Bechtel Fellowship might be right for you. Selected fellows receive up to $7,500 to visit and study at the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature of the George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville. Applications are due October 15, 2024.

New to the field of children's librarianship and want to attend your first ALA Annual Conference next June in Philadelphia? The Penguin Random House Young Readers Group Award may be just the ticket for you. Two librarians will be chosen to attend and given $1,200 to help offset costs. Applications are due November 15, 2024.

Mary Schreiber (l), co-chair of the Professional Recognition and Scholarships committee, and Oralia Garza de Cortés (r), 2024 recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, at the ALSC membership meeting at the ALA Annual Conference in San Diego this past June.

Now is the time to shine a light on an ALSC individual member who has made a significant contribution to the field of children's librarianship or ALSC. This can be over a career lifespan or through a special project that had wide impact. ALA members, nominate that coworker, friend, or mentor you respect for the Distinguished Service Award. Nominations are due December 15, 2024.

Learn more about these and other ALSC Awards by visiting the ALSC Professional Awards & Grants website at https://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/profawards.

Contact the ALSC Professional Recognition and Scholarships committee co-chairs Mary Schreiber, schreiberalsc@gmail.com, and Gwen Vanderhage, gvanderhage.ala@gmail.com, if you have any questions.

ALSC Member Profiles

Mariel Matthews, Head of Patron Services, Long Beach (NY) Public Library

What prompted you to join ALSC?

Initially, one of my favorite graduate school professors recommended that I become a member of both the American Library Association (ALA) and ALSC because of the numerous resources that ALSC offers. Additionally, I strongly align with the mission and objectives of ALSC in supporting and advocating for the needs of children and young adults through the provision of high-quality library services and resources.

What made you want to work in children's services?

In a previous professional life, I served as an educator. When transitioning to the field of librarianship, I found a natural fit for children's services. My prior experience working with youth ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade provided a solid foundation for this shift. The transition from lesson planning for a traditional classroom setting to planning for a storytime was relatively seamless.

What are you most passionate about in children's services?

I am most passionate that all children, no matter their socioeconomic status, have access to books and really dope librarians. I support children being supported with their learning literacy journey.

What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative and why?

I love signing children up for a library card. I love explaining all the free perks that they now have access to. Why? For some children, the library is the only place they will have the ability to access so many books and tech.

Melissa Sokol, Children's Services Librarian, Dayton (OH) Metro Library

Why did you join ALSC?

Each December, Dayton Metro Library's children's librarians, led by Tish Wilson, used to get together for day-long Mock Caldecott and Newbery discussions. This piqued my interest in becoming a member. Then I attended my first ALA annual conference in Chicago in 2017 with my co-worker and friend Allison Knight. After hearing about her experiences serving on the Notable Children's Recordings committee, attending ALSC 101, and the ALSC leadership meeting at the conference, it cemented my decision to start submitting volunteer applications to work on committees.

What made you want to work in children's services?

I am the youngest of four children in my family, and I grew up wishing my parents would have a fifth child so that I could show my older siblings how a fantastic older sibling should treat the younger ones. I never got my wish, but I poured that passion into babysitting, being the fun cousin at family reunions, and eventually getting my undergraduate degree to become an Intervention Specialist. After teaching for six years, I started my MLIS and knew that I would be most at home sharing my enthusiasm for reading and literature with the youngest of patrons.

I love providing spaces and opportunities for our young patrons to find: stories they love, facts that fascinate them, learning opportunities for new skills, and avenues to share their creativity. Being a children's services librarian at a branch allows for so much one on one interaction with children and getting a sense of current interests and trends that can lead to creating fun programming and dynamic displays.

What is your favorite library event, program, or outreach initiative and why?

The program I am most excited about is one I started about two years ago, called the What's New Book Club. I started reviewing books for the South Western Ohio Young Adult Media Review Group in 2010. I enjoy getting to read new children's books and hearing other librarians' reviews and recommendations.

One winter break I was visiting family in Virginia and my 11-year-old nephew started reading one of the books I had just finished. When he was half way through I asked him if he also found it annoying that the author kept describing characters with the same analogy or simile every time they entered the story, such as "Felix, who was smart as a whip" or "Carrie, who was tough as a lion." He disagreed with me and said no, he liked it because it helped him keep track of who people were in the story and make a stronger picture of them in his mind.

That was a real "Aha!" moment for me. I realized that I and the other librarians that reviewed these books, were well intended and enthusiastic readers, but we were not and never could be the intended audience for these books. This led to me trying to find a fun way for kids to get their honest book reviews to authors and publishers. As COVID restrictions were winding down, I decided to start a book club, where members ages eight through fourteen could read newly published books, write reviews for the ones that they loved, and record their voice reading the review. Then they get to make a sock puppet and we record a video of them acting out their review as it is played back to them.

Our social media specialist then takes the audio and video files and edits them together into videos for the library's social media pages, mainly Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This format allows for the kids to engage in social media without having to show their faces or even use their real names. The unexpected aspect of this club is the fact that it has made a safe space for tweens to become close and supportive friends while sharing their love of reading.

What are you currently reading?

Well, the honest answer to this question is that, after having just finished a two-year commitment to the Notable Children's Books committee, I'm mostly reading books for adults. However, professionally I just finished *The Observologist: A Handbook for Mounting Very Small Scientific Expeditions* by Giselle Clarkson. It's an engaging book with fun illustrations and ideas for utilizing sidewalks, yards, and puddles to practice many scientific experiments. I also just finished *The Five Impossible Tasks of Eden Smith* by Tom Llewellyn. It is an enjoyable fast-paced adventure with puzzles that have enough clues in the text that the reader will be able to predict how Eden can complete the smithing tasks that will set her grandfather free!

Megan Jackson, Youth Librarian, St. Louis (MO) County Library

What prompted you to join ALSC?

When I began my professional library career, I was looking for any opportunity to learn as much as I could within my new field. At that time, joining ALSC seemed like a very straightforward path toward finding interesting ideas and learning new skills. What I didn't expect (but was thrilled to find) was that ALSC is also an avenue toward professional fellowship as well! I've found so many opportunities to make connections with other youth services librarians, and I relish them all.

What made you want to work in children's services?

I have always enjoyed reading and working with youth. Originally, this set me on the path to becoming a high school English teacher. After a few years of both teaching and working part-time at a public library, I decided to combine those passions in a new way.

Now in my current position, not only do I get to still talk about my favorite books with teenagers, but also sing along with toddlers at storytime, gush about kids' cool creations at LEGO club, and try out new art techniques at Tween Crafters. And, I no longer have to grade any papers!

What are you most passionate about in children's services?

I feel very strongly about the library's role as a community-building resource and its potential as a "third place" for children and families. Post-lockdown, I think many of us realized the need for more community and support in our lives, and yet we continue to see a lack of community-building spaces that are not tied to commerce.

From new parents trying to find camaraderie among others, to teenagers desperate for face-to-face socialization outside of the pressures of school, the resource many are missing is simply a free place to gather. I feel most successful in my role as a youth librarian when I see a group of children, teens, or adults fostering connections and, frankly, making new friends. If we are here to support our community, perhaps one of the best ways to do that is to simply hold space for them. &

Using the Science of Reading (SoR) to Support Beginning Readers

Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian and Betsy Diamant-Cohen

***Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian**, PhD is an educational psychologist with experience supporting birth-adult learners in libraries and beyond. She currently manages education and engagement efforts at CET (PBS). **Betsy Diamant-Cohen** is a children's librarian with a doctorate, an early literacy trainer, consultant, and author. She is known for translating research into practical activities with developmental tips and presenting these via webinars, engaging workshops, and online courses.*

Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) was designed to help libraries and caregivers become partners in early literacy development. The initiative was informed by scientific research on the critical skills underlying early reading and writing along with best practices for supporting their development. ECRR was introduced in 2004, revised in 2011, and subsequently evaluated and revised in 2017.[1]

Research regarding reading continues to advance, especially as it pertains to beginning and fluent readers and the role context and culture play in learning.[2] Since children's librarians are continually encouraged to focus their efforts on getting children ready to read, learning about the science of reading helps us see the bigger picture.

The science of reading (SoR) is a robust body of research, comprising many sciences, that explains the various processes involved in learning to read and understand written language.[3] It's not a settled science because researchers continue to test the veracity and validity of their work.[4] The SoR is not a new strategy, program, or silver bullet for developing readers, although it is currently portrayed this way in social media and popular press. The SoR involves a complex orchestration of skills and interactions,[5] but policymakers in many state departments of education are not taking into account the entire science when making decisions. Instead, their focus is on the simple view of reading (SVR), even though many theoretical models and processes of reading exist[6] and continue to emerge.[7] The narrative around SoR has become extremely polarizing.[8] This can be attributed, in part, to a lack of understanding, which is why this column is addressing it.

The SVR defines reading comprehension as the combination of two equally important components[9]: decoding (word recognition) and listening comprehension (language comprehension). Although the researchers who coined the term acknowledge the complexity of the reading process, their simple formula does not unpack these components, address how they overlap, or offer instructional guidance.[10] This is concerning since how we define reading prioritizes and shapes what gets taught and the products that get endorsed.

When decoding is discussed, in the SVR, phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and sight word recognition are brought to the forefront. When listening comprehension is mentioned, vocabulary is often the only construct acknowledged in this domain, which is problematic since there is research evidence highlighting the significance of background knowledge, culture/content knowledge, verbal reasoning, language structure, and perspective-taking in the reading process.[11]

Most teachers and researchers agree that the reading process is more complex; it is broader than phonological awareness, alphabetics, and word reading. They also agree that more rigorous research needs to examine instructional practices in classrooms and that one size does not fit all when it comes to students, schools, or districts. And while libraries are not focused on the teaching of reading, they can certainly stay abreast of the latest research and continue offering access to a diverse body of texts and engaging experiences.

Some Newer Beginning Reader Series

Spot by Amicus Publishing
Word Families by Amicus Publishing
The *Jack* books by Mac Barnett and Greg Pizzoli
Read and Rhyme by Bearport Publishing
Stairway Decodables by Capstone
Little Blossom Stories by Cherry Blossom Press
I Can Read! / Fiona the Hippo books by Richard Cowdrey
I Spy with My Little Eye by Crabtree Publishing
What Can I Bee? by Crabtree Publishing
Super Readers by DK
I Like to Read® Comics by Holiday House
Pull Ahead Readers by Lerner
Camila by Alicia Salazar
Ready-to-Read Graphics by Simon & Schuster

*Thank you to Boone County (KY) Public Library staff for their input.

Readers' Advisory for Beginning Readers

Motivated readers are engaged readers[12] and although there are many titles to choose from, our children and families need quality readers' advisory. While decodable texts composed of controlled vocabulary and phonetic patterns allow students to practice skills and build confidence and motivation, they have not been shown to have a significant impact on reading achievement alone; children who experience both decodable and non-decodable texts fare better on reading outcomes.[13] The key is exposing children to books of interest to them, so they want to learn to read, and giving them practice reading no matter how easy it will or not be to decode the text.

The volume of texts that engage and inspire children continues to grow. While the ALA Youth Media Awards are consulted for the best and most notable, librarians spend countless hours curating book lists to meet library customers' needs and wants. This work must continue. It is quite possible for early readers to develop literacy skills when they are exposed to picture books and nonfiction, even if they cannot read all of the words. Training in ECRR made it easier for us to select books to support specific skills and practices in storytimes and encouraged us to generate lists of engaging texts to help meet certain learning objectives. Lists can be broad like Books with Rhythm or Rhyme, or more narrow and matched to specific skills like, Books with Alliteration or Books Supporting Syllable Segmentation. Assemble your lists by listening to caregiver and educator requests and matching those needs to quality texts.

The need for "early," "easy," or "just-right" books has been long established. Choosing a beginning reader book can be overwhelming and it is possible to have vastly different experiences across branches and library systems. Leveling systems (e.g., Lexile, Accelerated Reader, Fountas & Pinnell, etc.) and categories assigned by publishers vary greatly and can have unintended consequences such as labeling children, restricting children's access to information and enjoyable books, and causing children to become frustrated when there aren't enough decodable words. They can be useful tools when they are clear and consistent and staff can explain their nuances.

Many libraries use color coding schemes describing book characteristics in simple terms. The earliest level readers might be described as having large print, few words, and large pictures, but the format can vary within a level; some texts may be composed of only high frequency words, others may feature word families, some are meant to be read with an adult, etc. The decodability of these readers varies tremendously and can present a challenge to a child with a limited understanding of *orthography*, or how words work. Chicago Public Library has begun addressing this issue by classifying a subset of their beginning readers as decodable, and categorizing them according to word features (e.g., CVC words, blends and digraphs, r-controlled vowels, etc.). As long as library users are educated about the classification systems at their disposal along with their distinctions, they can better support their learners' needs.

Helping children become readers begins with nurturing relationships—parents, siblings, extended family, teachers, and friends. They need to experience a wide variety of texts, have multiple opportunities to read and write, and be surrounded by people supporting their efforts. Moreover, they need to be shown how enjoyable these opportunities can be. &

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THE LAST WORD

Fostering a Love of Reading

Kelly Hayes

I always knew reading was something I wanted to foster in my home since I knew many of the benefits—bonding with your child, language development, empathy, and emotional awareness. After welcoming children into our family, kids' books have flooded our home; you can find them everywhere, on a shelf in the family room, scattered in a playroom, in bedrooms, and in the car.

Reading is part of our daily routine. While books are always accessible, we make sure to take time each evening to curl up with a few books before bed—something simple but consistent during the days that often become so busy.

But I would have to say, my kids became most excited about books and reading through our local library's storytimes. After having my first baby, I quickly learned what a welcoming place the library was for little ones, even if they were colicky and not so quiet! Soon, I found myself driving all over town to find storytime that fit our schedules, and our personalities! We quickly became connected to Ms. Sharon, who always brings enthusiasm and fun to her storytimes. My kids, now eight, six, and four continue to reference the library as "Ms. Sharon's Library."

Through our time at the library, we have discovered not only new books but additional resources for learning and fun. Our family is currently deep in the Harry Potter series. While the reading level is a bit challenging for some of us, we listen to the audiobooks while following along with the books that we also check out at the library. I hope my children's love for books and reading will only continue to grow! &

Kelly Hayes *is a former speech-language pathologist and stay-at-home mom; she lives in Green Bay, WI, with her husband, their three readers Millie, Greta, and Simon, and two dogs.*

Got a great, lighthearted essay? A funny story about children and libraries? Books and babies? Pets and picture books? A not-so-serious look at the world of children's librarianship? Send your Last Word to Sharon Verbeten at childrenandlibraries@gmail.com.

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