

**Early Literacy Storytimes for Preschoolers in Public Libraries**

**Prepared for the Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council**

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## Executive Summary

Canadian public libraries are positioned to respond to pan-national and local concerns about developing early literacy skills. By delivering early literacy storytime programs, by partnering with other community organizations, and by tracking program outcomes and initiatives, Canadian public libraries promote the development of literacy skills in preschool children. In the delivery of early literacy programs for preschoolers within libraries and other community settings, the value of library staff members who are experienced and trained in children's services cannot be overstated.

Canadian public libraries have a strong history as contributors to children's literacy skills through the presentation of storytime programs. The purpose of this project was to develop a framework of best practices to support the planning, development, and delivery of effective early literacy storytime programs for preschoolers aged three to five years. This project was commissioned by the Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council (PTPLC) to further position public libraries to address early literacy needs in Canada.

The project was developed in two stages. The first stage was a literature review of current literacy models in order to identify and define early literacy skills. The second stage was a comprehensive telephone survey of library practitioners currently providing excellent storytimes as identified by their respective jurisdictions. A total of thirty-five individuals were interviewed, representing the practices of 400 libraries and eleven jurisdictions.

Through a review of the literature and interviews with library staff across Canada, best practices for early literacy storytimes were described and assessed. Thirty-five staff members representing 400 library branches discussed the components of and objectives for their storytime programs, their training for delivering storytime to 3 to 5 year old preschoolers, and any existing early literacy outreach initiatives in their communities.

Interview data found that the formal or informal adoption of elements from the American Library Association's program, Every Child Ready to Read® is evident in the practices of 346 out of 400 libraries consulted. Of the formal adopters, some use the original version including academic terms such as "phonological awareness," while others have adapted plain language variations.

Prior to the research project, the extent to which the ALA program, Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR), is utilized in Canadian library programs was not known. The ALA program includes: training from certified trainers, scripts and booklists for program planning and delivery and the positioning of libraries as "literacy coaches" supporting parents and caregivers as the first literacy teachers.

Five recommendations were developed from the results of the literature review and library survey. In summary, the recommendations offered to the PTPLC, are as follows:

With the expectation that the revised version of Every Child Ready to Read® will be released in the fall of 2010:

1. That PTPLC adopt ALA's Every Child Ready to Read® as best practice for early literacy preschool storytimes;
2. That each Canadian province and territory adopt ALA's Every Child Ready to Read® as best practice for early literacy preschool storytimes;
  - "Adopt" is intended to recognize that applications of ECRR may differ depending on specific circumstances when staff training, community outreach, or programming is considered. For example, libraries may already have developed preschool storytime programs incorporating components of ECRR, but would still benefit from the ECRR staff training.
3. That PTPLC fund a national training session with a certified trainer on the Every Child Ready to Read® program at a future conference or special event; that provincial and territorial governments consider supporting regional training sessions with certified trainers from Every Child Ready to Read; ® and that PTPLC explore working with The Partnership to develop online ECRR training options;
  - Online training would provide flexibility and inclusion for rural and remote libraries in particular.
4. That given the proposed endorsement of the ECRR program, PTPLC investigate the feasibility of developing a partnership with Every Child Ready to Read®: to create Canadian certified ECRR trainers; to offer French-language translations of any updated ECRR materials; and, to incorporate Canadian additions to the ECRR booklists;
5. And, that PTPLC facilitate the development and dissemination of Every Child Ready to Read® content in partnership with the Canadian Library Association, provincial and territorial library associations, and other relevant organizations.
  - For example, dissemination might include a central web portal that includes information such as: Calgary Public Library uses a plain language version of ECRR, while the Toronto Public Library system has branded their own plain language version of ECRR; the Ottawa Public Library's French translation of ECRR is used by the ALA; and, libraries including Toronto Public Library and Edmonton Public Library have Canadian booklists to augment ECRR on their websites.

## Introduction

Public libraries have a long tradition of offering preschool storytime programs intended to introduce a love of reading and a foundation of early literacy skills. These skills constitute “what children know about reading and writing before they actually learn to read and write” (Ghoting & Martin-Díaz, 2006, p.5). By preparing children to be taught to read when they are ready, the early literacy perspective is that literacy begins to develop before formal schooling begins. However, the impact of public library storytimes on the development of early literacy skills in preschoolers aged three to five years of age remains inadequately explored in the literature about literacy (MacLean, 2008, p.8). Not only has little been written in Canadian library literature about these public library services for preschoolers, but a recent national study of early literacy cites the lack of systematic research evaluating Canadian literacy programs in general (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009, p. 23). Librarians recognize that it is time to move beyond their intuitive belief that early positive experiences with libraries and reading will build a foundation of pre-literacy skills and the social confidence that children require to succeed in formal schooling. We must foster and measure effective early literacy storytime practices.

The role of Canadian public libraries in supporting early literacy is underscored by the recognition that “nationally the public library is the only public institution responding to the learning needs of the pre-school child” (Newman, 2004, p. 11). This unique position has arisen in part because other early education programs are developed within varying provincial and territorial jurisdictions, and because “federal support has for many years been concentrated on adult literacy and skill development, with little or no direct support provided in the area of early literacy” (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009, p. 9). The opportunity then exists for public libraries to contribute on a national scale to the dissemination of best practices for delivering early literacy programs to preschoolers. To identify and communicate these practices would address the problems noted in a recent review of the literature about public libraries’ early literacy programs: first, libraries are seldom mentioned in early literacy literature; and secondly, in Canada, “literacy initiatives have traditionally been conducted on a local scale without a national presence to encourage research in this area” (MacLean, 2008, p. 5). To highlight consistent practices grounded in research about preschoolers and pre-reading skills will assist public libraries as community partners in supporting parents, caregivers, and day care workers in the development of early literacy skills, and will contribute to a national literature about effective literacy practices.

The programs in Canadian public libraries and steps taken to evaluate library programs must be included in a truly pan-national discussion of early literacy. To address the lack of national co-ordination regarding preschool literacy needs, recent efforts to facilitate a national discussion have included the National Strategy for Early

Literacy Report and Recommendations (NSEL) (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009). The NSEL Report cites the lack of systematic research evaluating Canadian literacy programs in general. And yet, an American study demonstrated that research-based library programs for preschoolers led to increases in literacy behaviors across income and education levels (American Library Association, News Release, 2004). The challenges for public libraries in Canada then include: promoting early literacy initiatives broadly and nationally; facilitating information-sharing and support for early literacy program leaders in library and library outreach settings; and, evaluating these programs for literacy outcomes in order to contribute to the growing body of knowledge regarding the effectiveness and impact of developing early literacy skills. As a starting point for a program designed to foster early literacy skills, it is useful to review what is meant by early literacy skills, and to consider an overview of the developmental science and research behind the emergence of these skills.

## **Scope and Purpose of the Report**

This project was commissioned by the Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council (PTPLC) to be conducted from the autumn of 2009 through the spring of 2010. The purpose of this project was to develop a framework of best practices to support the planning, development, and delivery of effective early literacy storytime programs for preschoolers aged three to five years. The focus included programs delivered in-house in public libraries as well as programs delivered by public library staff in outreach settings such as day cares. In addition, the delivery of effective programs focused on library outreach to train community partners in effective early literacy practices.

Early literacy skills were identified and defined; best practices for early literacy storytimes were assessed through a review of the literature about early literacy programming in public libraries, through reviewing recent physiological, environmental, and pedagogical approaches to early literacy skills, and through consultation with library staff about their experiences with storytimes for preschoolers. To identify a manageable age group for the purposes of this project, programs for the preschool age range of three to five years were selected; however, a focus on this group continues the development of early literacy skills which begins at birth (Ghoting and Martin-Diaz, 2006, p. 5). Library staff members in varied Canadian jurisdictions were asked about the components of their preschooler programs, the involvement of parents and caregivers in the programs and in practicing the skills modeled by library staff, and about any training in effective early literacy practices that staff members have received or conducted within their communities.

Objectives of this project included identifying early literacy skills and best practices for programs in order to support early childhood literacy in Canadian public libraries. A framework of recognized best practices was intended to develop and affirm the competencies of library staff both in understanding the foundations of early literacy skills and of continuing to deliver with enthusiasm and confidence exemplary preschool storytime programs. In turn, the need could be assessed for a training module for early literacy preschool storytimes; library staff could offer such training to community partners, in order to share the knowledge and expertise of public library staff in outreach settings. In the delivery of early literacy programs for preschoolers within libraries and other community settings, the value of library staff members who are experienced and trained in children's services cannot be overstated.

Finally, the project was to include commentary on evaluating the effectiveness and impact of such programs on the development of early literacy skills, to contribute to the literature about Canadian public library services. By introducing a discussion of measureable components, this project was intended to begin to address the lack of Canadian research concerning early literacy programs cited in library literature; the lack of attention given to public libraries in research about literacy; and, the lack of systematic evaluation of early childhood literacy in Canadian research. Public libraries

would then be even better positioned to respond to the type of recommendation in the recent report of the National Strategy for Early Literacy (NSEL), that early literacy supports “should build on existing community resources, such as libraries . . .” (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009, p. 38). Public libraries are positioned to demonstrate and refine an expertise in fostering literacy, working in concert with parents and caregivers, and in support of other community partners.

## Methodology

### Canadian Best Practices for Preschool Storytime

A literature review was conducted in order to seek information on existing best practices for library storytimes, and as background preparation for interviews with library staff about delivering preschool programs. The sources consulted for research into early literacy development and early literacy library programming included library and education periodicals, as well as texts for early childhood educators and library practitioners. Reports from institutes with a national or provincial scope and specializing either in child or family literacy, or in children's health and development were included both for information about developing and assessing early literacy, and to note whether public libraries were included in discussions of these skills and services. Information was sought regarding current approaches both to the development of pre-literacy skills, and to the delivery or assessment of library storytime programs. Attention was given to seeking Canadian examples of library programming and literacy research in the literature. An online search of some library websites was conducted as part of the literacy review, in order to identify and analyze the presentation to the public of any information about early literacy skills or storytimes.

Discussions with public library staff across Canada about how they conduct preschool storytime programs demonstrate their enthusiasm for the mandate of introducing young children to libraries and storytime. Library staff members were generous in sharing their ideas and resources and interested in learning about the practices and experiences of others. The researcher began with the assumption that the best practice for a preschool storytime would depend in part on specific contexts and situations.

Initial contacts for exploring current best practices were provided by members of the Literacy Sub-Committee of the Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council, and some of these contacts suggested further storytime practitioners. The researcher also sought out further participants by contacting libraries directly. Efforts were made to include representation from each province and territory, as well as considering within these jurisdictions, library programs in northern, southern, urban, and rural locales, and large and small library systems. At the time of writing, no responses were available from the following jurisdictions: The Northwest Territories and Nunavut. The survey questions at Appendix A were distributed to participants so that they had the opportunity to consider them before a follow-up phone interview was conducted. Most phone interviews lasted 30 minutes.

A questionnaire was used to ensure that each study participant was asked the same questions and to provide an invitation to expand upon the information requested concerning best practices (see Appendix A). Study participants were asked to identify any storytime programs for preschoolers aged three to five years carried out by their

libraries. They were given the opportunity to discuss the goals and pedagogy of their programs, to identify the features and elements of the programs, to reflect on how the program elements contribute to an interest in reading and pre-literacy skills, and to comment on any specific curricula, staff training, and community outreach initiatives for early literacy conducted by library staff. In some cases, an experienced manager would describe system-wide practices for a range of library branches within an urban, regional, or provincial jurisdiction. In other cases, the discrete programming at an individual library branch was outlined. Therefore, while 35 library staff members responsible for storytime programs were interviewed, the number of library branches represented in the results is 400. A summary of the findings in response to each question is included in Appendix D.

## Defining Early Literacy

Some of the terms surrounding literacy tend to be used interchangeably, such as early literacy, pre-literacy, emergent literacy, and reading readiness. However, many literacy theorists and practitioners draw distinctions between these terms, highlighting the different ideas about how and when literacy, and in particular, reading, develops. While it is beyond the scope of this study to compare and assess in detail the different views about these literacy models, from the point of view of identifying terms, and in order to set out decisions made about a framework of best practices, it is worth noting some of the distinctions that currently are made in the literature.

Literacy researchers, Connor, Morrison, and Slominski (2006), differentiate the reading readiness model in which “learning to read begins with formal school-based reading instruction” (p. 666), from the emergent literacy model that “views literacy-related behaviors that occur in the preschool period as . . . important features on a developmental continuum . . .” (p. 666). The emergent literacy model suggests a continuous and interrelated view of literacy development, including skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are “developmental precursors” to learning to read and write (Connor, Morrison, and Slominski, 2006, p. 665). The reading readiness model, on the other hand, posits that there are specific moments in a child’s development when the child is ready to learn to read. The reading readiness model traditionally focuses to a great extent on reading and writing skills, while the emergent literacy model invites a broader definition of literacy by including “precursors” such as the development of oral language. In the emergent literacy model, using oral language is viewed as interrelated with and a precursor to recognizing written language, in a natural evolution of skills.

Literacy researchers Ghoting and Martin-Diaz (2006) support the idea in reading readiness that formal reading cannot occur before a particular stage of developmental and neurological maturity has occurred, and they also critique the emergent literacy model for presenting literacy skills as evolving naturally and without assistance (p. 5). Ghoting and Martin-Diaz (2006) agree with the importance of “precursors” to formal literacy discussed in the emergent literacy model, but they argue that such precursors – particular practices and factors, from a nurturing environment, to activities that stimulate the brain – affect the development of formal literacy skills. According to Ghoting and Martin-Diaz, these practices are intentional and contribute to attaining the stage of developmental readiness for formal reading proposed in the reading readiness model; and, such deliberate practices are underrepresented by the emergent literacy model of a natural process that evolves without nurturing (p.5). Studies such as the work of Connor, Morrison and Slominski might suggest that the critique made by Ghoting and Martin-Diaz oversimplifies developments in the emergent literacy model; however, a comprehensive survey of these theories is beyond the scope of this study.

The early literacy model is grounded in specific research and views the literacy-related behaviours that develop before formal schooling as essential to literacy

development. Thus, similar to the emergent literacy model, the early literacy model has a broad definition of literacy that includes the development of foundational skills such as oral language. However, similar to the reading readiness model, the early literacy model includes an examination of the developmental stages needed for reading to be possible. Specifically, as preparation for formal literacy, the early literacy perspective encompasses research into the physiology of learning to read, research into how social environments affect learning, and research into identifiable early literacy skills (Ghoting and Martin-Diaz, 2006, p. 6). Library literacy specialists such as Diamant-Cohen (2007) now claim that “literacy has been redefined to include pre-literacy skills” (p. 41) as part of school readiness, suggesting another view of literacy as a continuum which begins with identifiable precursors to formal reading and writing, identifiable foundations that underscore school readiness. The early literacy perspective is based on research into those identifiable foundations.

## Identifying Early Literacy Skills

Six early literacy skills have been identified as precursors to reading skills. One of the best-known expressions of these skills comes from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in the United States, which worked with the American Library Association to introduce the six skills in the Every Child Ready to Read® @ your library® program (Ghoting and Martin-Diaz, 2006, p. 5). The skills that are foundational to formal reading are listed by the NICHD as:

- 1) Print Motivation: to model reading as an enjoyable activity will encourage children to be open to learning to read and to persist in learning with less frustration. If children associate being read to with closeness and opportunities for positive interaction, and if they are exposed to books that match their individual curiosities and interests, they will be more likely to have a positive attitude about literacy. Dialogic reading assists with fostering motivation, as discussed below under Narrative Skills.
- 2) Phonological Awareness: to become aware of the sounds that make up words, including concepts such as rhyme and syllable breaks, will prepare children to read. As part of this preparation, to sing songs, to clap along, and to recite rhymes all allow children learn to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words.
- 3) Vocabulary: to understand a rich variety of words through conversation and being read to assists children in naming the world around them and in making the transition from recognizing oral language to recognizing words in print.
- 4) Narrative Skills: to be able to tell stories that follow a sequence of events, such as recounting the day's activities or telling a story from "once upon a time" to "happily ever after," helps children to understand sequencing and communicating. Dialogic reading assists with these skills: children are invited to participate in a dialogue about a story by being asked questions about what is happening "on the page," and about what they think will happen in the story. Adults can also promote a dialogue by asking children questions about the stories depicted in the children's visual art.
- 5) Print Awareness: to become aware of the uses of the print found all around us, and to understand how printed language works is an important part of learning how to read and write. For example, children become aware that in languages such as English and French, print is read from left to right and from the top of the first page onwards. They identify print in the environment from signs, to labels, to picture books, understanding that each unit of meaning is composed of symbols (letters) and separated by a space.

- 6) Letter Knowledge: to develop awareness that individual letters have specific shapes, names, and sounds helps children prepare to read. A young child who is exposed to the appearance of letters will then respond to learning the sound associated with the letters, and may enjoy locating the first letter of his or her name.

(National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2006).

The expectation is not that children exposed to these skills should begin reading as preschoolers, but rather, that these elements are the necessary building-blocks for when children do learn to read. Commentary about introducing the six pre-literacy skills and about implementing the ECRR program is included in this report in the section on best practices in Canadian libraries.

Positive early literacy experiences can combine with other skills to “enable a child to enter into a classroom ready to learn” (Diamant-Cohen, 2007, p. 40). As Diamant-Cohen (2007) observes: to be nourished, to be curious, and to have a foundation in social skills such as taking turns, listening to others, and controlling one’s behaviour are among the skills that enable the expression of early literacy skills once the developmental age for formal schooling is reached (p. 41).

## Early Literacy Research

### The Brain and Early Literacy

Recent developments in the study of how the brain processes information have been augmented by the development of brain scan technology. Such research can assist librarians in creating programs that contribute to the development of early childhood literacy. For example, it is now known that “experience affects the brain and can change the way in which the brain functions” (Diamant-Cohen, Riordan, and Wade, 2004, p. 12). With this information about how “experience” makes a difference, and which experiences matter, library staff can better communicate information about the development of early literacy skills to parents, to caregivers, and to other community partners.

In brain development beginning in infancy, connections between the brain cells or neurons make learning possible. Many of these connections or neural pathways are developed during a child’s first five years through multisensory experiences: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. Furthermore, chemicals such as serotonin create stronger transmissions between cells, and emotions, particularly positive ones, activate the young brain. Electrical impulses are stimulated to travel between neurons. Axons send information and dendrites receive information. Notably, a neuron has one axon, but a neuron has many dendrites to receive information. When new neural connections are created, and if they are used frequently, a myelin sheath forms around the pathways to strengthen and protect them. As a normal part of development, synapses that are not used are pruned away, so that a child actually has many more synapses than an adult does. (Cobb, 2007, p. 29; Diamant-Cohen, 2004, p. 13; Ghoting and Martin-Diaz, 2006, p. 6; Shonkoff, 2000, p. 185). In creating programs for preschoolers, we now know that we can influence the physiology of the brain by creating an environment that evokes positive emotions, an environment where multisensory modes of learning are experienced, and an environment that repeats and reinforces the messages that we want to be retained. Parents can be reassured that when children ask to read a favourite book over and over again until the children themselves can tell the story, they actually are building and strengthening dendrites through the act of repetition.

### The Social Environment and Early Literacy

The historical role of children’s services in public libraries continues to include providing resources and services to a range of socio-economic groups, as well as entertaining and teaching children through storytime programming. A more recent development in the role of children’s services is the conscious modeling of early learning behaviours and skills to parents in workshops and in storytime programming. In a recent

article about the evolution of best practices in storytimes, Albright, Delecki, and Hinkle (2009) quote the now common adage expressed by Renea Arnold that “the parent is the child’s first teacher. The librarian is the parent’s first literacy coach” (p.16). This approach embraces the centrality of the parental and caregiver role, emphasized in approaches to family literacy, where respect for parent-child interaction as “the foundation of literacy development” is fostered through sharing skills and information with parents (Thomas & Skage, 1998, p.13). Coaching during storytime programs entails not only modeling appropriate practices for introducing early literacy, but also, explaining what is occurring and how the activities being practiced introduce early literacy skills.

Encouraging parents and caretakers to reinforce early literacy skills through activities at home helps libraries and librarians to have a greater positive impact on the development of a love of reading in young patrons. Librarians can assist parents in incorporating early literacy skills outside of the library in daily activities. This repetition is more beneficial to children than being exposed to the skills only when attending library programs. Ghoting and Martin-Diaz (2008) cite Lois Bloom’s comment: “it turns out that frequency matters,” to explain that children from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds “all have the same kinds of everyday language experience” (p. 11). The link between developing early print literacy and later reading success is due less to the kinds of experiences, and more to the amounts of experiences afforded some children (p. 11). Similarly, Savage’s 2009 study of evidence-informed teaching strategies for improved literacy skills presented for the National Strategy for Early Literacy (NSEL), found that “language-rich environments,” such as homes “characterised by much shared book experience and purposeful and meaningful use of language through supporting naturalistic play and active learning” significantly affect early literacy (p.7). Because children benefit from shared daily reading and conversation with an adult, during storytimes, librarians can offer concrete suggestions and encouragement for literacy activities to parents, helping to bridge the library and home environments.

### Planning Early Literacy Programs and Coaching Parents

To support the delivery of best practices, librarians and library staff can consider a variety of ways to communicate information and activities associated with early literacy to parents in addition to the verbal explanations commonly offered during storytime programs. From bulletin board and web site displays to take-home information, from opportunities for mini-workshops with refreshments immediately following storytimes to inviting parents and caregivers to play a role in programs, encouraging responsiveness promotes early literacy as a partnership between libraries and families. To position librarians as literacy coaches supporting parents is in line with family literacy approaches that posit literacy as “a family, rather than individual, skill” (Deane, 2004, p. 49). Such partnerships between libraries and families require care, as debates within the field of family literacy demonstrate.

Thomas and Skage (1998) cite both sides of the family literacy debate about early literacy “instruction” given to adults. First, they note that having “middle class trainers” directing “the right way” to read “may undermine the values and self esteem of adult participants whose cultural and ethnic backgrounds” may differ from those of the trainers (p. 15). Similarly, in a recent presentation about the literacy development of Aboriginal children in Canada, Ball (2009) discussed the need for sensitivity: “rather than being based on an assumption that European-heritage languages and literacies are normative and ideal, new approaches must be based on an assumption that Aboriginal languages, including varieties of English and French, literacies, parenting styles and pedagogies are equally valid . . . “. However, without ignoring the need for cultural respect, the other viewpoint presented by Thomas and Skage (1998) suggests that parents from varied backgrounds “recognize the importance of literacy and of reading to their children, and want to learn about strategies and techniques that will enable them to effectively guide their children’s literacy development” (p. 15). Librarians must consider approaches that recognize the backgrounds of participants and that build on a foundation of personal family experience as a valuable component of literacy (Thomas & Skage, 1998, p. 14-16).

In order to maximize the effectiveness of program delivery, it is important to consider the training given to staff concerning the identification of early literacy skills, the effective integration of these skills into preschool programs, and approaches to communicating these messages to family and agency partners with confidence and due respect. While introducing early literacy skills in library storytime programs for preschoolers entails the use of many traditional features of library storytimes, significant changes cited by Albright, Delecki and Hinkle (2009) include the use of dialogic reading techniques, where children are invited to participate rather than to listen passively to stories, and a more overt foregrounding of the six identified early literacy skills both in program planning and in coaching parents and caregivers. Training and support for staff ranges from reviewing effective phrasing of dialogic questions, to providing program ideas for developing specific early literacy skills. Currently, literacy support materials and programs exist but “are not consistently available across Canada” (Newman, 2004, p. 12). Ensuring that library staff in all provinces and territories have access to a foundation of knowledge that supports the planning and delivery of early literacy storytimes strengthens the role of libraries and enables partnerships with families and community agencies using a framework of evidence-based best practices.

## Library Survey Results

These points summarize the results of telephone interviews held with staff members in public libraries across Canada. Given the mandate of identifying best practices, the results are interesting in noting the degree of awareness of pre-literacy skills; the amount of training in conducting storytimes available to staff; the question of participation by parents and caregivers in the programs; and the design and content of the programs, themselves. For further information, the questions provided to participants for the interviews are located in Appendix A. In Appendix D are more detailed explanations of the responses which are summarized here.

- Storytimes programs for preschoolers are prevalent in Canadian public libraries.
- The formal or informal adoption of elements from the American Library Association's program, Every Child Ready to Read® is evident in the practices of 346 out of 400 libraries consulted.
- Many libraries may welcome tools or materials that provide training in pre-literacy skills and in conducting storytimes, since 12 out of 35 respondents described formal training opportunities, especially for new staff, while 13 respondents stated that no training was offered. Infrequent or casual training was described by 8 further respondents. Library systems that have adopted preschool storytime curricula (e.g. Toronto, Newfoundland and Labrador) are most likely to offer system-wide, regular sessions of training.
- Library staff members may appreciate training so that they are well-equipped to teach community organizations and partners about pre-literacy skills and about selecting and sharing books for preschoolers. Where staff size makes outreach possible, library branches with developed storytime curricula are more likely to report forming outreach partnerships to teach about literacy skills.
- Library staff members consider the most important feature of storytime to be introducing a love of books and reading, but the majority also identify specific pre-literacy skills and articulate how the program elements in storytimes can reinforce those skills.
- Storytime programs are most commonly organized around specific themes or topics; fewer programs are organized to showcase specific pre-literacy skills or letters of the alphabet.
- Parents are the most likely adults to bring children to preschool storytime programs, but libraries should note the growing trend of grandparents in the care-giving role when considering program development and delivery.

- Twice as many libraries report having adults participate in the storytime program as report having adults leave during the program.
- Preregistration and drop-in program formats are equally represented.
- Storytime programs for preschoolers averages as a 30-45 minute program offered once weekly, but the same program may be repeated in different time slots.
- The most common activities in a storytime program are having a welcoming ritual, reading stories to children, using a flannelboard and/or puppets in storytelling, and sharing fingerplays and action rhymes.
- One third of respondents offer a craft with a pre-made sample, one third have the children design their own creations, and one third either never use crafts as part of preschool storytime, or only incorporate crafts on special occasions. Libraries with developed curricula regarding early literacy skills are more likely to be moving away from the regular inclusion of crafts, but may instead offer take-home handouts.

## Evaluating Progress in Early Literacy Storytimes for Preschoolers

Public library services for preschoolers have received little attention in Canadian library literature. A recent national study of early literacy also cites the lack of systematic research evaluating Canadian literacy programs in general (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009, p. 23). And yet, research indicates both that research-based programs in libraries involving parents and other caregivers impacts positively on developing pre-literacy skills, and also, that the introduction of these skills is the role that North Americans identify as the mission of public libraries (Newman, 2004, p. 11). Initial evaluative measures include steps to assess the integration of early literacy skills into programs and to assess library staff knowledge about the identified skills. Tools for evaluation include observation of early literacy storytime programs, discussions or interviews with participants in the programs and training workshops, and checklists for program planners to identify the early literacy skills and program components that they integrate into their program delivery. Parents can be asked to self-report on the development of their understanding and actual literacy practices. The Every Child Ready to Read® program includes checklists and tools for such evaluations.

However, it is beyond the scope of this particular study to try and address the challenges that would be associated with longitudinal studies of how well preschoolers who attend early literacy storytimes adapt to reading readiness and formal schooling. As Ghoting, trainer for the Every Child Ready to Read® @ Your Library® program, remarked to Betsy Diamant-Cohen, research does support the identification of six early literacy skills, and research does support that adults who are given encouragement and information about literacy will increase their early literacy behaviours with their children. And yet, it is challenging to isolate early literacy storytime programs as the definitive factor affecting reading readiness in most cases (Diamant-Cohen, 2007, p. 44). Moreover, as Ball (2009) notes in her study of Aboriginal children's literacies, challenges exist in gauging and evaluating early literacy skills when current tools come out of research "involving predominantly children of European heritage in urban settings with English or French as their first language." Further discussions with researchers and practitioners in the early literacy field may provide further insight in addressing such evaluative challenges. Steps such as collecting data from the program checklists and parent commentaries included in programs such as Every Child Ready to Read® could provide a starting point for tracking early literacy skills in Canadian libraries.

## Recommendations for Early Literacy Preschool Storytimes

The extent to which Canadian libraries already have adopted components of Every Child Ready to Read® was not known prior to this research. Proposed revisions to the curriculum of ECRR are expected to address issues raised by some Canadian librarians interviewed for this study such as requests for greater attention to diversity, for talking points instead of rigid scripts to use with parents, and for customizable tools for libraries. The provision of authorized trainers and of updated tools for program assessment is slated to continue. Because a stated goal of this “turnkey program” is to identify ways “to ‘institutionalize the initiative” (Neuman, 2010), it may be worthwhile to inquire with the developers of ECRR about a possible partnership. This partnership could include the addition of Canadian content to booklists, if Canadian libraries are to consider adopting the updated training and/or program on a wider basis. Alternatives to be considered might include pursuing training from ECRR, while adopting Toronto Public Library’s plain language “Ready for Reading” materials and Canadian booklists and/or using Ottawa Public Library’s French translation of ECRR (since ALA already makes use of this translation). Because so many Canadian libraries already have invested in this well-researched program, it would be efficient to consider how to develop the existing relationship with ECRR for program development and staff training.

This recommendation also considers that library systems that already make partial or full use of the foundational principles behind ECRR could flexibly adopt and adapt the elements of ECRR that fit their circumstances. For example, library staff in Newfoundland and Labrador might participate in ECRR staff training and could utilize information about the six pre-literacy skills in parent and community training workshops, while still making primary use of their new, province-wide early literacy storytime program. Every Child Ready to Read® deserves further consideration since it includes the staff training, program delivery components, outreach tools, and respect for the centrality of parents in modeling literacy required to position public librarians as “the parent’s first literacy coach” (Albright, Delecki, and Hinkle, 2009, p. 16). The interview results demonstrate that there is a desire among library staff for programming information, early literacy skill training, and concrete approaches to community outreach; moreover, library systems with developed program curricula are demonstrated to be more likely to offer training and outreach in furthering the goals and awareness of early literacy.

In summary, the recommendations offered to the PTPLC, are as follows:

With the expectation that the revised version of Every Child Ready to Read® will be released in the fall of 2010:

1. That PTPLC adopt ALA’s Every Child Ready to Read® as best practice for early literacy preschool storytimes;

2. That each Canadian province and territory adopt ALA's Every Child Ready to Read® as best practice for early literacy preschool storytimes;
  - "Adopt" is intended to recognize that applications of ECRR may differ depending on specific circumstances when staff training, community outreach, or programming is considered. For example, libraries may already have developed preschool storytime programs incorporating components of ECRR, but would still benefit from the ECRR staff training.
3. That PTPLC fund a national training session with a certified trainer on the Every Child Ready to Read® program at a future conference or special event; that provincial and territorial governments consider supporting regional training sessions with certified trainers from Every Child Ready to Read;® and that PTPLC explore working with The Partnership to develop online ECRR training options;
  - Online training would provide flexibility and inclusion for rural and remote libraries in particular.
4. That given the proposed endorsement of the ECRR program, PTPLC investigate the feasibility of developing a partnership with Every Child Ready to Read®: to create Canadian certified ECRR trainers; to offer French-language translations of any updated ECRR materials; and, to incorporate Canadian additions to the ECRR booklists;
5. And, that PTPLC facilitate the development and dissemination of Every Child Ready to Read® content in partnership with the Canadian Library Association, provincial and territorial library associations, and other relevant organizations.
  - For example, dissemination might include a central web portal that includes information such as: Calgary Public Library uses a plain language version of ECRR, while the Toronto Public Library system has branded their own plain language version of ECRR; the Ottawa Public Library's French translation of ECRR is used by the ALA; and, libraries including Toronto Public Library and Edmonton Public Library have Canadian booklists to augment ECRR on their websites.

## Conclusion

Canadian public libraries have been identified as the public institution that addresses preschoolers' learning needs (Newman, 2004, p. 11). Recently, they have been identified as an institution practiced in partnerships and equipped to be a foundation for needed early literacy supports (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2009, p. 38). This report further positions public libraries to play those roles, by considering how libraries do work and can work with parents, caregivers, and other community partners to foster early literacy. Even though some literature about pre-literacy skills uses terms such as emerging literacy and early literacy interchangeably, it should be noted that this study bases its approach on the early literacy model of learning, which, in turn, includes the expertise of researchers such as Jack Shonkoff with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in The United States, and J. Fraser Mustard and Stuart Shanker (2007) with the Canadian *Early Years Study*. Central components of this model of learning involve the physiology of learning and involve families and caregivers in skill development as part of the optimal social environment for learning. In order to encapsulate and deliver practices that best develop early literacy skills, consideration was given both to current-day Canadian best practices for storytime programs and to current training models and practices for library staff. The findings and recommendations are intended to address the needed contributions of public libraries in developing early literacy skills in Canadian families.

## Appendix A

### Library Survey Questionnaire

I am conducting a survey for the Literacy Committee of the Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council (PTPLC). The survey is part of a project to determine best practices for including early literacy skills in Preschool Storytimes for children aged 3 to 5 years. Given the important role of public libraries in literacy development for preschoolers, your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated.

Before speaking with you by telephone or in person, I would like you to have the opportunity to consider the following questions, which all participants will be asked. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. My next step will be to contact you and arrange a time to phone you and discuss these questions.

Heather McKend

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(506) 643-7229

Children's Librarian, Fundy Library  
Region

Saint John, New Brunswick

Your Name:

Your Position:

Name and Location of your Library:

- 1) Does your library have storytime programs designed for preschoolers aged 3-5?  
If so, please list the programs, and provide brief descriptions of them.
  
- 2) Who is most likely to bring the child to the storytime program?
  - a) parent
  - b) sibling
  - c) home caregiver/babysitter
  - d) preschool
  - e) other (specify)

- 3) Is it your practice to have adult visitors leave the room or to be present during the program with the preschoolers?
- 4) Is your preschool storytime drop-in or is preregistration required?
- 5) How frequently is the preschool storytime program held?
  - a) once a week
  - b) twice a week
  - c) other (specify)
- 6) What is the average length of the program?
  - a) Less than 30 minutes
  - b) 30-60 minutes
  - c) More than 60 minutes
- 7) Please list the activities from your preschool storytime program, including all that apply:
  - a) having a greeting or ritual to begin every storytime program
  - b) having a goodbye or ritual to end every storytime program
  - c) reading storybooks to children
  - d) focusing each storytime on a different but specific theme
  - e) doing fingerplays and rhymes with the children
  - f) using flannelboard and/or puppets to tell stories
  - g) using music
    - singing
    - dancing
    - children using musical instruments (e.g. shakers, bells)
    - leader using musical instrument (e.g. guitar)
    - recorded music
  - h) arts & crafts involving predesigned "sample" that families construct
  - i) arts & crafts involving children designing their own pictures or creations
  - j) computer activities
  - k) refreshments
  - l) other (specify)

- 8) How do your preschool storytime programs contribute to children's interest in reading and their early literacy skills? Please consider the relevant individual activities that you noted at question 7 in your reply.
  
- 9) Do you have any practices that contribute to the success of your preschool storytime but that are not listed at question 7? If so, what are they?
  
- 10) Do you refer to any specific guidelines or standards in planning preschool literacy programs (e.g. a specific curriculum)? If so, please explain.
  
- 11) Is training in conducting preschool storytimes and/or training about early literacy skills available at your library? If so, please describe the training and who is responsible for conducting the training.
  
- 12) Does library staff train others in how to share with preschoolers books and early literacy skills? (e.g. training parents, community groups, daycares)? If so, please explain.

## Appendix B

### Six Early Literacy Skills Plain Language Adaptation from Calgary Public Library

Early Literacy is what your child knows about reading and writing before they can actually read or write.

Research shows that here are six important pre-reading skills your child can start learning from birth.

#### **I LIKE BOOKS!**

##### **1. Print Motivation**

A Child's interest in and enjoyment of books

- Let your baby explore books
- Read to your child when he is in the right mood
- Pick books that are fun and stimulating

#### **I SEE WORDS!**

##### **2. Print Awareness**

Noticing that print is everywhere, knowing how to handle a book, noticing how we follow words on the page.

- Let your child handle sturdy books, and turn the pages
- Pick a book with repetition, and point to the text as your read
- Point out signs at the grocery store

#### **I HEAR WORDS!**

##### **3. Phonological Awareness**

Being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words

- Being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words
- Read rhyming books and nursery rhymes to your child
- Play games with word sounds: break words into "chunks" (mush room)
- Sing songs together! If you don't know a children's song, any song will do

#### **I KNOW LETTERS!**

##### **4. Letter Knowledge**

Knowing that letters are different than one another and have different shapes and different sounds

- Read books about shapes, and play with shape toys
- Sing the alphabet song and borrow ABC books from the library
- Appeal to your child's senses by making letters out of other things, like play doh

## **I KNOW WORDS!**

### **5. Vocabulary**

Knowing the names of things

- Read a variety of books to your child; children's books are full of rich language
- Name objects you see each day
- Speak in the language you are most comfortable with

## **I CAN TELL A STORY!**

### **6. Narrative skills**

The ability to describe things and events and to tell a story

- Share a book rather than read it: ask your child to tell you what's happening in the pictures
- Tell your child a story without a book. Having a story in your head can come in handy
- When reading a familiar or predictable story, ask your child what will happen next.

Visit the Library with your child. Pick out an assortment of books, and as your child gets older, let him select his favourites. Ask Library staff for help choosing great books and other resources. Check out the free programs too!

Appendix C  
Libraries that Participated in the Study

Library	Location	Number of Library Branches Represented
1. Allard Regional Library	St-Georges, MB	1
2. Border Regional Library	Viridin, MB	1
3. Brandon Public Library	Brandon, MB	1
4. Bren Del Win Centennial Library	Deloraine, MB	1
5. Calgary Public Library	Calgary, AB	17
6. Confederation Centre Public Library	Charlottetown, PE	1
7. Cornwall Public Library	Cornwall, PE	1
8. Edmonton Public Library	Edmonton, AB	16
9. Fort McMurray Public Library	Fort McMurray, AB	1
10. Glenwood & Souris Regional Library	Souris, MB	1
11. Greater Sudbury Public Library	Sudbury, ON	13
12. Halifax Public Libraries	Dartmouth, NS	1
13. James McConnell Memorial Library	Sydney, NS	1
14. Lac du Bonnet Regional Library	Lac du Bonnet, MB	1
15. Moncton Public Library	Moncton, NB	1
16. Montreal Children's Library	Montreal, QC	1
17. Newfoundland & Labrador Public Libraries	St. John's, NL	96
18. North-West Regional Library	Swan River, MB	1
19. Ottawa Public Library	Ottawa, ON	33
20. Parkland Regional Library	Yorkton, SK	54
21. Portage la Prairie Regional Library	Portage la Prairie, MB	1
22. Red River North Regional Library	Selkirk, MB	1
23. Regina Public Library	Regina, SK	9
24. Reston District Library	Reston, MB	1
25. Saint-Joachim Library	La Broquerie, MB	1
26. South Central Regional Library	Winkler, MB	1
27. South Interlake Regional Library	Stonewall, MB	1
28. Sussex Regional Library	Sussex, NB	1
29. Teulon Library Branch	Teulon, MB	1
30. Toronto Public Library	Toronto, ON	97
31. Vancouver Public Library	Vancouver, BC	20
32. Watson Lake Library	Watson Lake, YT	1
33. Whitehorse Public Library	Whitehorse, YT	1
34. Wolfville Memorial Library	Wolfville, NS	1
35. Winnipeg Public Library	Winnipeg, MB	20
		(=400)

Appendix D  
Summary of Interview Results

1) The prevalence of storytime programs designated for preschoolers aged 3-5:

Out of 400 library branches, the majority were identified as having designated storytime program for 3-5 year olds. Four interviewees stated that they have no such program, although one of these hoped to start a program within the year.

Of the four exceptions, three discussed single libraries, while the fourth was describing a regional library system encompassing 54 branches in smaller towns and rural areas. The fourth participant stated that while many branches did not have a preschool storytime program, depending on local need they might have other literacy programs which would include preschoolers. For example, she noted wide usage of the family-literacy based “Come Read with Me” program developed in Saskatchewan in 1993 and aimed at empowering parents who are not comfortable with books and reading to interact with their young children in literacy-based activities. She also mentioned the “Alphabet Soup” program aimed at preschoolers and their families, and involving literacy to discuss good nutrition. Finally, some branches used the “Book Mates” program from the University of Manitoba, consisting of workshops for parents of preschoolers about understanding the value of reading and writing in early literacy. More information about any of these programs is available from the overview of family literacy approaches available on the National Adult Literacy Database (Thomas & Skage, 1998, [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)).

In two cases, the interviewees explained that they did not offer preschool programs because other opportunities for that age group such as daycare or nursery school existed in the community. One of the two interviewees explained in more detail that her library had decided to offer programs for babies and toddlers instead of preschoolers because a drop in staff numbers required a choice; other local programs existed for preschoolers but not for younger children and infants; and, the library was responding to a demand for toddler and baby programs. Overall, most of the libraries contacted do offer preschool storytime programming.

2) Who brings a child to a preschool storytime program:

If library staff members want to model effective approaches to interacting with books, it is significant to identify who is most likely to bring the preschooler to a storytime program. The most identified adult overall is a parent.

The next most likely adult to bring a child to a program is a home caregiver or babysitter; however, in this category, while many identified the caregiver as a paid babysitter or nanny, a grandparent increasingly is identified as the caregiver.

Grandparents were identified only two fewer times than other caregivers, and were identified as the second most likely followed by the first most likely adult to bring a child to storytime. Other types of caregiver were more likely to be the second or third identified person. In cases where grandparents accompany children to a program, the reasons are not uniform. The prevalence of grandparents as caregivers was attributed to any of: a cultural tradition; a response to a lack of other affordable daycare options; or, a reflection of the priorities of retirees who want to spend time with their grandchildren. Of those grandparents who choose to attend programs with grandchildren, the library was viewed as offering options for direct participation and interaction, unlike other activities where grandparents could only observe (e.g. some sports). In some cases, too, grandparents might attend storytime with grandchildren to relieve parents at home with younger children and babies. In one larger urban centre, it was reported as not unusual for paid caregivers to transport the children downtown to working parents or grandparents, and the parents or grandparents would then attend storytime at a downtown library branch with their children or grandchildren.

In one of the less common patterns of attendance, four interviewees identified nannies as more likely than parents to bring children to a preschool storytime. This pattern is significant in specific neighbourhoods or communities, even if it was not reported frequently overall. Although library staff members mentioned accommodating home daycare providers who would bring a few children, larger preschool or daycare groups are usually given a separate storytime program in the library or as an outreach program. Only one library identified an older sibling as likely to bring a child to storytime, and in that case, the older child would be encouraged to take a leadership role in the program. In most cases, however, parents followed by caregivers and grandparents do attend storytime programs, and therefore, are potentially positioned to learn about early literacy skills.

3) Do the adults remain for the program or leave the room:

In terms of adult involvement and the opportunity for the library staff member to be positioned as a “literacy coach,” many do invite or require adults to be present for storytime and cite the importance of adult participation as part of the program experience. While twice as many libraries had adults remain in the room as those who asked adults to leave during storytime, some libraries who require that adults leave do advertise their program as an opportunity for children to develop independence as a specific social skill. Independence and the ability to focus and control oneself are other skills associated with school readiness (Diamant-Cohen, 2007, p. 41).

The libraries where independence is stressed tend to have a graduated set of protocols setting out how often and when the preschooler can leave the program room to seek the caregiver as the child learns to tolerate the separation. Some respondents suggested that it would be ideal to offer both programs where adults remain and

sessions where they leave, because some families seek activities to do together at the library, and preschoolers in daycare or playgroup already experience a lot of social independence. One librarian noted that the “circle time” format of storytime requires that children develop important social skills and learn to focus, regardless of whether parents are present or absent. Some librarians noted a movement from a focus on children’s social independence to a focus on having adult participation; they linked this change to the adoption of early literacy practices that focus on families learning together and practices that could move between the library and the home. Four interviewees viewed it as the adult’s choice whether to remain or leave during a program, suggesting that either the programs do not follow a specific philosophy about preschooler independence or adult participation, or, as one person remarked, that the staff views the dynamics on a spectrum, where parents are gradually encouraged over time to remain and participate, but ultimately make their own choice.

Alternative or additional reasons given for including adults in preschool storytimes are the lack of a designated space or program room where children could be separate from adult caregivers, the decision to permit younger children to attend the program with adult supervision, and the need to have adults assist with activities in the program. Also, some libraries approach preschool storytime as part of a family storytime program. To be present for the program provides the opportunity at minimum for adults to observe library staff modeling pre-literacy skills. However, two survey participants cited as a challenge getting parents or caregivers in the room to move from observing to participating – one finally moved to ban adults from the room during the program because their chatting was too disruptive and too difficult to alter. It was volunteered that giving parents or babysitters a “break” from care-giving by not requiring that they be in the room during the program could be positive for that adult and for the child. In situations where social independence is prioritized, other approaches to the enterprise of literacy as a partnership between families and libraries could be considered, if literacy is “a family, rather than individual, skill” (Deane, 2004, p. 49).

4) Are programs drop-in or do they require pre-registration:

Pre-registration can assist programmers with planning, but it can also be a barrier to participation by the public. From the interview results, storytime programs are balanced between preregistration and drop-in options; four more respondents reported using the drop-in approach than those using pre-registration. Reasons for requiring pre-registration include being able to direct program activities to the abilities of a specific group of children, becoming better acquainted with a particular group of children, planning more effectively, and managing capacity. Where pre-registration is required, attention is paid to alternatives such as having other drop-in programs available, so that people are not excluded overall. In two of the urban library systems surveyed, people are expected to be library cardholders to register for programs and must register online for preschool storytime. Therefore, library policy about

membership and technology to support registration can be factors in the chosen approach.

5) How often is the preschool storytime program offered:

Programs most often are offered once a week; the same program may be repeated two or three different times throughout the week. Many libraries organize the program into “blocks” ranging from four to twelve weeks, with six weeks being the most common. This organization may allow children to become familiar with one person over a number of weeks followed by a staff change after the unit of storytimes is completed. Due to staff size or job description, in some libraries, the same staff person or volunteer always delivers the program. Some librarians use the six week pattern to organize programs to feature different pre-literacy skills from week to week. It is common to follow this pattern of weekly storytimes through the autumn, winter and spring. Summer programming varies, with some libraries taking a break and instead offering different programs, and others offering summer reading clubs including programming for preschoolers. In a few cases, storytime only is offered during the summer, but in most cases, storytime programs are delivered once weekly from the autumn through the spring.

6) How long are preschool storytime sessions:

The average length of a storytime program for 3 to 5 year olds is between 30 and 45 minutes. Only a few librarians listed programs running closer to 60 minutes, and many of these include time for socializing at the start or end of the program. The time for socializing might include activities where toys, puzzles, or activity centres are present. One library offers a program lasting between 1 and 1 ½ hours on Saturdays, where children engage in many hands-on activities as well as hearing stories read to them. In addition, libraries could have longer sessions in the case of family-literacy programs with a focus on educating adults about literacy and books as well as time for interacting with children. In one example, “Come Read with Me” runs for 1 ½ hours over eight weeks, and “Alphabet Soup” (literacy and nutrition) runs for 1 ½ hour sessions over seven weeks. However, for engaging 3 to 5 year olds, most librarians found that 30 to 45 minute storytimes are the best fit.

7) Program Activities:

In turning to the elements featured in the early literacy storytime programs, a rich variety of features was reported. Common elements included having a welcoming ritual, reading stories to children, using a flannelboard and/or puppets in storytelling, and sharing fingerplay stories and action rhymes. Crafts will be addressed separately, because of differing views regarding the use of crafts in preschool storytime. Many librarians incorporate music, from singing and using shakers, to movement, to recorded music, but only in a few cases do the leaders use musical instruments such as guitars or

autoharps, themselves. To present themes that change from week to week remains common, although some libraries instead build programs around pre-literacy skills or the letters of the alphabet. Displays to encourage families to take home books also remain common. Nobody reported using computers as part of storytime, and refreshments were seldom included outside of special storytime events, particularly due to allergies. As noted, a few programs incorporate puzzles, toys, story sacks, or games (e.g. “Duck Duck Goose,” “Hot Potato”) as part of socializing at the start or end of a program. Oral storytelling or “Draw and Say” stories were mentioned by a few librarians, as were puppet mascots who might direct the program and serve as an outreach tool in the community. To have the children record and create stories or act out stories was noted in a few cases. In addition, the children might have name tags that they place on a display board to monitor attendance, to help learn the participants’ names, and to assist the children with letter recognition. Overall, the most frequently repeated activities remain reading stories, storytelling with a flannelboard and/or puppets, and reciting fingerplay rhymes and action rhymes.

In considering the place of crafts in a pre-literacy storytime program, approximately one third of respondents include a craft that families construct while following a sample; one third of respondents have the children invent or construct their own craft or picture during the program, and one third either have no craft, or only include crafts during special or seasonal storytime events. Stated reasons for not having crafts included observations that craft supplies tax program budgets; the parents end up doing the crafts, themselves; the crafts are time consuming to prepare and execute; and, that crafts take too much time away from literacy activities during a brief program. Reasons for including crafts include teaching fine motor skills such as cutting, pasting, and manipulating crayons; offering multisensory approaches to learning; providing a souvenir of the library experience to take home; and providing a mnemonic device to remember the stories and rhymes. For example, one librarian mentioned the creation of “popsicle stick puppets” that the children would use to act out and retell the story over and over at home. Library systems that have adopted specific curricula focusing on pre-literacy skills seem more likely to limit the use of crafts; in some cases they instead give handouts or colouring sheets for the children to take home to reinforce the program theme, to reinforce the words from rhymes, and/or to reinforce pre-literacy skills.

8) and 9) How the program and specific practices reinforce an interest in reading and pre-literacy skills:

The top response to what storytime programs and specific practices offer was the joy of stories, a curiosity about books and language, an understanding of books as objects, and an awareness of the “jobs” of authors and illustrators. Beyond that, the majority of librarians discussed how specific program elements such as flannel stories or action rhymes reinforce the six pre-literacy skills. Those aware of programs such as Every Child Ready to Read® offered examples of dialogic questions, of how children could assist with sequencing and predicting outcomes to stories, of making children

aware of the sounds and appearance of letters, and of building vocabulary. A few went outside the realm of literacy skills to discuss other skills preschoolers could develop in storytime, such as social independence, listening, sharing, and motor skills. A minority of respondents could not identify the benefits of their programs beyond the love of books, but the vast majority of respondents included that very important feature of storytime along with an awareness of other specific literacy-related skills.

10) Program guidelines or curricula followed:

Many library staff members referred informally to their own professional collections for programming ideas. In some regions and systems, the library staff makes use of specific program guidelines and curricula for program delivery and staff training. For example, although the “Mother Goose” program is traditionally geared to ages 0-3 years, some staff adapt it for ages 3 to 5 years. In Prince Edward Island, a grant from the Department of Education makes possible training in the “Spring Into Reading” program, a 10 to 12 week program aimed at children in kindergarten through grade 2 and their parents, and a program which some librarians adapt for use with preschoolers. In Saskatchewan, in areas where the “Come Read With Me” family literacy program is used, a trainer can be made available to introduce staff to that curriculum and philosophy. All 96 library branches in Newfoundland and Labrador are adopting a preschool storytime program, “The Literacy Connection (TLC),” developed in the province and launched in January 2010. Incorporating a clear introduction to how libraries contribute to the development of oral language and early literacy skills through using books and rhymes, the curriculum is organized around themes or topics of interest to preschoolers, and provides detailed lists of resources and rhymes that can be adapted to library branches of different sizes. The six pre-literacy skills at the foundation of the American Library Association’s Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR) program are embedded in “The Literacy Connection,” but the curriculum eschews the academic terminology used to name the skills in ECRR.

Overall, a specific trend was noted in the use of the Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR) Program from the American Library Association. Out of 400 library branches, 202 formally use the program, including those in the library systems for Toronto, Ottawa, and Calgary. A further 144 branches make informal use of the program, meaning that they do adopt aspects of the program such as the six pre-literacy skills in their program planning and education of staff for program delivery, as well as in their efforts to model to and educate parents and caregivers. For example, staff members engaged in storytime programming for the twenty branches of the Vancouver Public Library are expected to have sought out ECRR training. The “Read, Talk, Play” program featured on the website for Edmonton Public Library also clearly introduces parents to pre-literacy skills that are foundational to ECRR. Thus, a total of 346 out of the 400 branches use ECRR to some extent. Because of this widespread adoption, further consideration of the findings regarding ECRR follows.

As noted previously, the Every Child Ready to Read® @ your library® program comes out of the research of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (Ghoting and Martin-Diaz, 2006, p. 5). After further research into the effectiveness of the program, the American Library Association has endorsed updates to the program and resources, headed by Dr. Susan Neuman, who recently has cited the release of the updated version for sale in the Fall of 2010 (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/ecrr/index.cfm>).

The current ECRR program is not without some controversy. Some librarians interviewed expressed caution about the program's academic language and approach to educating parents about pre-literacy skills. For example, a librarian at Regina Public Library noted that their nine library branches still make use of the ECRR ideas, but are moving towards a format with more "approachable" language and dynamics with parents. Staff members at Vancouver Public also adapt the ECRR scripts and language to suit specific situations, noting that if a key point of the program is to support families, the program needs to be matched to the diverse needs of communities. While making use of ECRR, some caution that a wholesale and formal adoption of the program can lead to being overly focused on "school readiness" rather than on conveying a love of stories.

Along with informal use and adapting ECRR, a common response to issues with the formal or academic language in ECRR is to adopt a plain language approach. For example, instead of discussing "phonological awareness," the librarian might tell parents about developing the skill of "hearing words." Calgary and Edmonton Public Libraries use a plain language version of ECRR that names the six skills from a child's perspective (see Appendix B), and Toronto Public Library has gone so far as to repackage and rebrand its own plain language materials for a version of ECRR called "Ready for Reading," the information for which can be viewed on their website. Toronto Public Library uses their variation as an umbrella for their suite of programs for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, and includes booklists with Canadian content to balance out the American focus of ECRR resources.

A different stance on the language used to describe the six pre-literacy skills in ECRR is provided by other libraries that use the official terminology, while explaining terms such as "phonological awareness" right away. In particular, the Ottawa Public Library system is a formal adopter of ECRR, which they also have translated into French. The interviewee from Ottawa Public recalled the research cited by ECRR trainers that using the "real names" helps more with changing parents' literacy behaviours across income and educational levels (American Library Association, 2004, <http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/news/pr2004/prfeb2004/>). While there exists some disagreement over the terminology and approach to informing parents used in Every Child Ready to Read, Dr. Susan Neuman's evaluation presentation recognizes the terminology as a challenge. The proposed changes to the curriculum to be released in the Fall of 2010 include less rigid "talking points" instead of a script to use with parents,

greater attention to diversity, updated research about the six identified pre-literacy skills, and the means for libraries to customize the program to fit their circumstances. While these features are only proposals, it would seem that the evaluation taskforce is considering criticisms and requests in seeking to position libraries to support families in developing literacy skills.

11) Library staff receiving training in planning and delivering early literacy preschool storytimes:

The number of respondents who reported receiving no training at their workplace in conducting preschool storytimes was approximately the same as the number that reported receiving formal training at work. The training could include mentoring or job-shadowing opportunities for new staff conducting storytimes, as well as including instruction about storytime planning and delivery. Of those who receive training, more respondents specified training for new staff than noted ongoing opportunities for continuing staff. Given their access to resources and a higher concentration of staff, larger, urban centres are the most likely to offer ongoing training and workshops at least once yearly for continuing as well as new staff members. Some libraries have occasional training, rather than having formal instruction and workshops between one and three times a year. Overall, most libraries either offer training in conducting storytime to new staff, or no training at all.

12) Library staff training others in the community in how to share books and early literacy skills with preschoolers:

When asked if library staff members do community outreach to train others in the importance of early literacy skills and in how to interact with preschoolers, 16 out of 35 respondents stated: no. Inadequate staff numbers and having early childhood development information offered elsewhere in the community were cited as explanations. Of the 35 respondents, 12 reported forming partnerships with other community organizations or postsecondary educational centres in order to conduct training. Partnerships reach a variety of community members: from teaching early childhood education students to teaching summer students employed by Parks and Recreation; from workshops for high-school students and workshops for the clients of Family Resource Centres, to sessions for the staff at daycare centres. In one case, partnerships were identified as necessary because of competition with other community groups that offer services to preschoolers. A further 7 respondents stated that they do occasional training sessions for others in the community if asked. Again, larger urban centres were more likely to have the staff resources and concentration or depth of community ties to make these outreach opportunities possible. In library systems where staff members themselves have received training, they are more likely to seek opportunities for partnerships in the community.

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