

Background Information on the Importance of Early Literacy Skills

Public libraries play an important role in the development of young children's early literacy skills.

In order for public libraries to provide children and their families with appropriate early literacy programming, it helps to have an understanding of the science behind early literacy practices.

- As the brain of an infant or toddler matures, exposure to a variety of environmental factors and social interactions will increase recognition of spoken language and written letters.
Lawhon, T., & Cobb, J. B. (2002). Routines that build emergent literacy skills in infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. *Early childhood education journal*, 30(2), 113-118. Retrieved June 7, 2005, from EBSCOhost research databases.
- The preschool years are critical to a child's early literacy development.
Justice, L. M. & Pullen, P. C. (2003). Enhancing phonological awareness, print awareness, and oral language skills in preschool children. *Intervention in school & clinic*, 39(2), 87-98. Retrieved June 7, 2005, from <http://search.epnet.com>.
- Interactive storybook reading – using books with large print, repetitive text, and print embedded illustrations - develops early literacy skills in toddlers.
Allor, J. H. & McCathren, R. B. (2003) Developing emergent literacy skills through storybook reading. *Intervention in school & clinic*, 39(2), 72-79. Retrieved June 7, 2005, from <http://search.epnet.com>.

Research has shown an infant or toddler can benefit from an activity-based, literature-rich environment that includes an early literacy component.

- Children learn freely in an environment that is safe, welcoming, and nurturing. Techniques, such as using positive words and phrases upon a child's entrance into the public library, help a child's brain experience a positive situation, thus providing growth.
Diamant-Cohen, B., Riordan, E., & Wade, R. (2004). Make way for dendrites: how brain research can impact children's programming. *Children and libraries: The journal of the association for library services to children*, 2(1), 12-20.
- Children acquire early literacy skills through age appropriate, hands-on activities, such as play, listening when being read to, holding a book, and using writing tools. Public libraries need to offer the following services to promote early literacy skills: age-appropriate spaces, materials, programming, and the opportunity for parents to experience appropriate reading skills being modeled.
Byrne, M., Deerr, K., & Kropp, L. G. (2003). Book a play date: The game of promoting emergent literacy. *American libraries*, 34(8), 42-44.

Resources

- *Learning environments for young children: Rethinking library spaces and services* by Feinberg, Kuchner, and Feldman (1998) offers research-based, developmentally appropriate practices for public libraries. This handbook includes a section offering suggestions for redesigning the children's library in an effort to improve the active learning environment. The handbook also offers practical information on cost effective methods to improve programming and facilities that will provide optimal stimulation to a young child.
- Children's librarians are always looking for the perfect theme, fingerplay, or activity that will make their storytime successful. *Creating Readers* by Pam Schiller (2001) offers over 1,000 games, activities, songs, and stories that encourage early literacy skills in preschoolers.
- *Early Literacy Storytimes at Your Library* by Saroj Nadkarni Ghoting and Pamela Martín-Díaz (2006) provides suggestions for how to easily integrate early literacy practices into a storytime session. They stressed the importance of explaining to adult attendees why certain components, such as songs, fingerplays, or the use of picture books, play an integral part in the development of early literacy skills.
- *More Than Letters: Literacy Activities for Preschool, Kindergarten, and First Grade* by Sally Moomaw and Brenda Hieronymus (2001) discusses the importance of surrounding young children with meaningful print.
- *Storytimes for Two-Year-Olds* by Judy Nichols (2007) is a book that shares proven techniques and programs to help turn this young audience into lifelong readers.
- *Baby Rhyming Time* by Linda Ernst (2008) is full of program ideas, songs, and rhymes targeted especially to babies to help them grow cognitively, physically and emotionally

Public libraries are offering programs designed to introduce early literacy practices. Some of the programs have been designed in house, while others are offered by national associations.

- The Emergent Literacy Project, a joint effort of the Public Library Association and the Association of Library Service to Children, provides participating public libraries with materials that aid parents, caregivers, and teachers in their efforts to enhance reading skills of young children. (Goode, *American Libraries*, April 2003 issue)
- *Mother Goose on the Loose* by Betsy Diamont-Cohen (2006) is the book that is based on an award-winning program that combines music, movement, visual literacy, and language development to help children get ready to read. Even more important, it helps young children get ready for school by learning how to focus and concentrate, learning social skills like taking turns, learning how to express emotions, and developing a love for learning that will ensure their success throughout their school experiences. (www.mgol.org)

- Every Child Ready to Read at Your Library is a program developed from a partnership between the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association. It is an early literacy program specifically designed for use in the public library. This program is designed to be presented by a children's librarian in an informal workshop setting to parents who wish to learn ways in which to teach their children early literacy skills. The program is based on the six pre-reading skills of early literacy. The program is unique in that it provides facilitator scripts that can be presented to parents about teaching early literacy skills to infants through toddlers. The program encourages discussion between the children's librarian and the parent about age appropriate books, as well as the use of songs and fingerplays. Children's librarians are encouraged to model appropriate ways to read a book, foster the use of rhyming at home, and suggest low cost activities that develop emergent literacy skills. This is a wonderful program and teaching tool that can be used by public libraries. All materials can be downloaded from the Public Library Association website free of charge. Materials include parent handouts, booklists, facilitator scripts, songs, fingerplays, and even pictures to teach vocabulary. All materials can be customized to reflect the public library offering the program.