EARLY LITERACY: THE FIVE PRACTICES

The following five early literacy practices develop six key early literary skills: Print awareness, print motivation, phonological awareness, vocabulary, narrative skills, and letter knowledge. A child's development is always relational, so early literacy engages entire families and lays the groundwork for lifelong readers. Try to integrate these five practices into every storytime!

TALK. Children learn language by listening to conversational speech.

- Encourage baby babble by asking questions, pointing to objects, and describing what you are doing. Respond to babble as you would to full words.
- Toddlers understand more than they speak, so it is helpful to use everyday vocabulary rather than "baby talk."
- Ask open-ended questions and allow children plenty of time to respond.
- Be sure to define new words.
- For preschoolers, read picture books with no words and ask them to help you tell the story. Or ask how they might feel in situations the book describes.
- Extend what children say. For example, if a toddler says "milk," respond with, "Would you like some milk to drink?"

SING. Singing helps children learn new words and concepts, and reinforces memory and phonological awareness.

- Sing clearly, slowly, and clap or move to the beat.
- Incorporate lapsits and bounces for babies so they associate caregiver connection with phonological awareness.
- Sing songs at various volume levels to help toddlers learn how to modulate their voices.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat! Repetition strengthens brain synapses and memory, from babies to preschoolers.
- Singing strengthens speech, social skills, and imagination, which strengthens kindergarten readiness.
- Children love singing even if adults are off key, so sing away regardless of your skill.

READ. Reading together develops vocabulary and comprehension. It also nurtures a love for reading through the interactional process wherein multiple people are all paying attention to the same story at once.

- Babies mirror adult facial expressions, so be sure to exaggerate any mood or feeling in a book you read aloud.
- Read a variety of books, from poetry to nonfiction, and have books and audiobooks available for browsing before and after storytime.
- Repeat the same books across multiple storytimes. Repetition helps toddlers master words and phrases, and increases self-confidence,

TIP:

To engage sight-impaired children with wordless books, describe pictures in enough words to allow them to form mental images. Alternatively, ask the child's caregiver to describe the photos to the child in a whisper. Be sure to give enough extra time for each page.

TIP:

Include sign language with storytime songs whenever possible.

TIP:

Consider providing fidget toys for children who have trouble sitting in one place for the length of a storytime read.

which prepares them for more learning.

- Choose fast-paced, engaging books to encourage print motivation, particularly those that encourage children to interact with the story.

WRITE. In early literacy, writing skills include becoming aware that printed letters correspond to spoken sounds and words. Children are also developing the coordination they will need to form letters.

- For babies, fingerplays, finger paint, and even playing with food at home helps to develop finger strength.
- For toddlers, scribbling and tearing give them practice with writing tools.
- For preschoolers, cutting and tracing practice gets them closer to forming letters on their own. Sand in a tray is also great for making paths with fingers or thick-handled paintbrushes.
- Provide lots of different drawing materials to play with.
- Celebrate their drawings! Ask children to sign their names, and display them in your library.

PLAY. Play develops language and literacy skills by allowing children to put thoughts into words and talk about what they are doing. Social interaction increases learning at all ages!

- Greet babies or toddlers as they enter storytime with a colorful puppet. This sets the tone with giggles and models play for caregivers.
- For babies and toddlers, set out blocks, puzzles, and simple games for free play. Naming shapes and colors is practice for naming to letters.
- For preschoolers, emphasize imagination, emotions, and empathy.

BONUS:

Counting is another foundational early literacy practice that builds core educational knowledge.

TIP:

For children sensitive to noise, create a quiet table with play items that they can retreat to at any time when they need a break during storytime or play time.

The five practices are based on Every Child Ready to Read standards from ALSC and PLA: http://everychildreadytoread.org/

EARLY LITERACY TIPS: VIRTUAL STORYTIMES

CHOOSING VIRTUAL STORYTIME BOOKS

- Look for books with high-contrast images, matte pages, and a consistent orientation.
- The shorter and more engaging the story, the better.
- Required: Double-check copyright! Every publisher has different policies, so contact them directly before reading one of their books virtually.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT DURING VIRTUAL STORYTIME

- Break up programming with movement breaks (stretches, dancing, etc.)
- Remember to introduce yourself and your library.
- Always introduce the book title, author/illustrator, and publisher (same for songs).
- Hold eye contact with the camera as much as possible.
- Consider asking someone to hold cue cards behind your recording device so you can maintain eye contact with the camera.
- Present a virtual schedule of storytime components.
- Start with your most engaging songs and books.
- Smile, ask questions, and maintain enthusiasm, just like for in-person storytime.
- Provide transitions between storytime elements (such as a clap or picture).
- Provide a document with songs and rhymes that parents can print at home.
- Be sure to use inclusive language, such as "y'all" or "friends," instead of "you guys."

VIDEOGRAPHY TIPS

- Required tools: recording device; good natural lighting, or a ring or umbrella light; and video editing software (unless you are recording live). Many free high-quality software options are available.
- Optional tools: microphone, speaker, music or book stand (to hold the book steady while you turn pages), props, cue cards, and a partner to interact with on camera.
- Facebook, YouTube, and Zoom are all popular virtual storytime platforms.
- Write a script so that you are extra intentional about word choice and pacing.
- Practice recording beforehand and watch your performance. Is the video well framed?
- Ensure audio and video quality is high.
- For pre-recorded videos, you can add large words and letters over the screen.
- Many video platforms allow you to turn on live captioning.
- Do not strive for perfection, and talk about your mistakes!

TIP:

To limit your video's audience, make a YouTube video unlisted, and send the link only to members of a private Facebook group. Consider leaving the videos up for a week or so to limit the time that the copyrighted material is available.

TIP:

YouTube videos are great for allowing children to go at their own pace. You can tell them to pause the video at specific times to discuss images, count items, or engage in movement activities.

This handout includes information from the OCLC WebJunction webinar, "Getting Started with Virtual Storytimes" (2020, June 16), presented by Renee Grassi.

EARLY LITERACY TIPS: SPANISH OR BILINGUAL PROGRAMMING

NOTE:

The term "second language" refers to any language a person learns that is not their first language. Many individuals learn multiple second languages.

BILINGUAL STORYTIMES

- Are primarily for Spanish-speaking families, but anyone can join!
- Strengthen both native language and second-language learning.
- Support early literacy through talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing.
- Help to dispel myths about second-language learning at home (see handout).
- Connect Spanish-speaking families in your community.

TYPES OF BILINGUAL STORYTIMES

- Bilingual with one presenter who is fluent in both languages.
- Bilingual with two presenters—one who speaks Spanish, and one who speaks English. The Spanish-speaking presenter can be a volunteer or staff member; ideally, this person is a native speaker or conversationally fluent.
- Sprinkle, or culturally inclusive, storytimes where English speakers present materials that sprinkle in words in another language. These are great, but be careful not to advertise them as bilingual storytimes because it opens a false door to bilingual families who may expect to be able to ask you questions in Spanish.

CHOOSING MATERIALS

- Know your audience and their countries of origin.
- Choose songs and activities from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries.
- Spanish grammar and vocabulary varies from region to region and country to country, so allow for variation.
- Choose songs and books written in Spanish

originally over English materials translated into Spanish, and use the tunes that are original to the Spanish songs.
- Be sure to ask a Spanish speaker to review all materials beforehand (and anything put on display). Just because a song or book is traditional does not mean it stands the test of time.
- Ask parents and caregivers for suggestions!
- Feature Spanish and/or bilingual materials (books, CDs, movies, etc.) that can be on display for patrons to check out before or after the program.

ENGAGEMENT TIPS

- Build community relationships alongside offering bilingual storytimes.
- Rehearse storytime components beforehand, especially if you have a partner. Be sure to match each other's energy!
- Call-and-response is a great way to engage all ages.
- Project song lyrics for parents to follow along and take pictures of the lyrics.
- Run activities that are fun for multiple ages, such as dancing and movement.
- Encourage parents to sit in a single row of chairs to encourage participation (but be sure to have extra chairs for those who arrive late or need extra room).
- When reading two books, read one full spread in both languages before turning the pages.
- Encourage families to stay and play.
- Be available for caregiver questions in both languages.
- Explain how libraries work in the United States and in your community, and where they can use their card.
- Provide library card applications and other print resources about the library and community organizations in multiple languages. Offer to help them fill out the forms.

BEST PRACTICES: OUTREACH TO SPANISH-SPEAKNG COMMUNITIES

STEP 1: RESEARCH LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS.

- The Latino community in the U.S. is young, large, and diverse. First-generation immigrants may come from any of 21 Spanish-speaking countries, not only Mexico or the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador).
- Start with local schools, city and regional governments, organizations that serve Spanish-speaking communities, and afterschool programs. Look at U.S. Census data and any available local demographic information.

STEP 2: ESTABLISH A PRESENCE OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY.

- Outreach is critical to building awareness of library programs.
- Consider local nonprofits, community centers, ESL classes at local churches, parks, businesses, grocery stores, restaurants owned by Spanish-speakers, daycares, health care providers, free lunch sites, etc.
- Connect with organizations already working with these communities, such as schools and health organizations. Relationship-building is key.
- Engage with city-sponsored events and parties.
- Invite partners to host events at your library for parents (and provide food).

STEP 3: IDENTIFY SERVICE GAPS.

- Identify community leaders and schedule conversation with them.
- Ask what services are currently offered and identify gaps your library could fill.
- Consider setting up a Latino advisory committee that meets a few times per year.

STEP 4: ADVERTISE PROGRAMS.

- Translate fliers into Spanish.
- Identify local Spanish-language media or radio stations.
- Send a Spanish-language email newsletter that features library events, or translate a portion of your newsletter into Spanish.
- Invite patrons to share their cultures!

STEP 5: KEEP IT GOING.

- Outreach is circular, not linear. Be consistent to develop that critical element of trust.
- Word of mouth is important!
- Be patient. Relationship-building is marketing, but it is a long-term process.

Adapted from "Before Bilingual Storytime: Engaging Latino and Spanish-Speaking Families" (2016) Webinar presented by Katie Scherrer and Lauren Simon. OCLC WebJunction.

DISPELLING MYTHS ABOUT RAISING BILINGUAL CHILDREN
(CAREGIVER HANDOUT)

Myth: Speaking more than one language at home will cause my children's English to suffer.

Pre-language milestones are the same in all languages, and bilingual children hit these developmental milestones in both languages at the same time as monolingual children.

Myth: Code-switching (switching between two languages in the same sentence) means my child is confused or at risk of developing a speech disorder.

Mixing languages is an effective communication strategy while children are developing their vocabularies. Usually by age four, children are able to switch between languages with no problems. If a bilingual child develops a speech or language disorder, their bilingualism is almost never the cause.

Myth: My child will fall behind in school.

Children who speak a second language at home typically do better in school than monolingual speakers. Children who speak two languages fluently often have better vocabularies, stronger empathy, and increased creativity and cognitive flexibility. Young children do great in English immersion classrooms. Older children, such as high schoolers, often do better learning in their native language while still learning English.

Myth. I should speak to my child in English at home so they are ready for school.

You should speak to your children in the language in which you are most fluent. Otherwise, you are modeling a lack of fluency and limited vocabulary, which can hinder language and academic development. Children who grow up in the U.S. typically have no problem learning English because they have ample opportunities to practice outside the home.

Myth: My English is not good enough to raise a bilingual child.

Children become bilingual from repeated practice in a given language. Their language ability is not based on the fluency of their caregivers.

Myth: Being bilingual means having the exact same proficiencies in both languages.

Language proficiency changes based on how a language is used and how often. Shifting fluencies are okay. Children who speak a second language at home and attend school in English typically develop stronger writing skills in English. Even after starting school, encourage your child to practice reading and writing in the language you speak at home. Children typically learn to speak fluently before they develop academic proficiency.

DISIPANDO MITÓS SOBRE LA CRIANZA DE NIÑOS BILINGÜES
(INFORMACIÓN PARA LOS CUIDADORES)

Mito: Hablar más de un idioma en casa hará que el inglés de mis niños se vea afectado.

Los logros del pre-lenguaje son los mismos en todos los idiomas, y los niños bilingües llegan a estos logros del desarrollo en ambos idiomas al mismo tiempo como niños monolingües.

Mito: Cambiar de código (cambiar entre dos idiomas en la misma oración) significa que mi niño está confundido o en riesgo de desarrollar un trastorno del habla.

Mezclar idiomas es una estrategia de comunicación eficaz mientras los niños están desarrollando sus vocabularios. En general, a los cuatro años de edad, los niños pueden cambiar entre idiomas sin ningún problema. Si un niño bilingüe desarrolla un trastorno del habla o idioma, su bilingüismo casi nunca es la causa.

Mito: Mi niño se atrasará en la escuela.

A los niños que hablan un segundo idioma en casa típicamente les va mejor en la escuela que a los monolingües. Los niños que hablan dos idiomas con fluidez a menudo tienen mejores vocabularios, empatía afectiva más intensa y una mayor creatividad y flexibilidad cognitiva. A los niños pequeños les va bien en las aulas de inmersión en inglés. A los niños más grandes, como los estudiantes de secundaria, les va mejor aprendiendo su idioma nativo mientras todavía están aprendiendo inglés.

Mito: Yo debería hablar en inglés con mi niño en casa para que esté listo para la escuela.

Usted debería hablar con su niño en el idioma en que usted sea más fluido. De otra manera, usted estaría modelando una falta de fluidez y vocabulario limitado, lo que podría obstaculizar el desarrollo del lenguaje y académico. Los niños que crecen en los EE. UU. suelen no tener problemas para aprender el inglés porque ellos tienen muchas oportunidades para practicar fuera del hogar.

Mito: Mi inglés no es lo suficientemente bueno para criar a un niño bilingüe.

Los niños se vuelven bilingües por la práctica repetida en un idioma determinado. Su capacidad lingüística no está basada en la fluidez de sus cuidadores.

Mito: Ser bilingüe significa tener exactamente las mismas competencias en ambos idiomas.

El dominio del idioma cambia basado en cómo un idioma se usa y qué tan a menudo. Los cambios de fluidez están bien. Los niños que hablan su segundo idioma en casa y asisten a la escuela en inglés típicamente desarrollan habilidades de escritura más fuertes en inglés. Incluso después de iniciar la escuela, anime a su niño a practicar la lectura y escritura en el idioma que usted habla en casa. Los niños típicamente aprenden a hablar de manera fluida más rápido de lo que desarrollan competencias académicas.

INCLUSION CHECKLIST FOR LIBRARY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- Ideally, all staff should have equity, diversity, and inclusion training. Check out Project READY and Project ENABLE (see Resources) for free online training geared to librarians and library administrators.
- Always seek insight and feedback from members of the community/staff with lived experiences.

RACE/ETHNICITY

- Feature books, resources, and displays that include diverse representations of race/ethnicity. Characters should not necessarily focus on specific historical events or moments of struggle.
- Avoid materials with characters portraying the "white savior" trope or materials where BIPOC are treated as "sidekicks" or represented in offensive, clichéd ways. Avoid materials that focus on specific historical events or moments of trauma.
- Marketing materials should feature youth from diverse backgrounds/ ethnicities without reinforcing cultural stereotypes.
- Art supplies/toys should include multiple skin tone options and representations.
- Include characteristics representing different cultures and lived experiences from BIPOC at events.
- Pay special attention to the pronunciation of names. Do not make up nicknames or shorten names to make them "easier" to remember.
- Be cognizant of the various implicit and/or unconscious biases, including affinity bias, when it comes to racial and ethnic diversity.
- Bring in presenters of all abilities that are culturally diverse.
- Think about your own racial and ethnic identity and engage in self-work before brainstorming and reviewing content for library programs.
- Create a team of colleagues to proofread ideas for content and programs through an inclusive lens. Avoid singling out any colleagues in an attempt to create an inclusive team.

Image source: Shutterstock

GENDER/SEXUALITY

- Include books and resources that present a wide range of gender norms.
- Avoid programming that caters to specific gender stereotyping.
- Avoid separating groups by gender.
- Use gender-neutral language when presenting ideas and information.
- Ask all program presenters/participants for their pronouns.
- Consider using gender neutral terms like "they" or "them" when referring to animal characters.
- When children present stereotypes in their own stories or in response to a question, consider discussing them with the group.

ACCESSIBILITY

- Language is always evolving. Be aware of current disability language when developing content for programs/services. (See style guide from NCDJ in Resources.)
- Always ask participants/speakers/staff with disabilities if they prefer

TIP:

Many people with disabilities find language such as "differently abled" offensive, as it can be seen as minimizing the lived experience of navigating concrete societal barriers that enable some bodies/ minds over others. To learn more about this topic, it may be helpful to learn about the medical vs. social models of disability.

- person-first (i.e., person with autism) or identity-first (autistic person) language when describing themselves, and never correct their preference.
- Always presume competence of people of all abilities.
- Site should be accessible, including accessible parking, paths, restrooms, and clearly identifiable wayfinding.
- Provide programming materials in a variety of formats, in addition to print, including audio, large print, e-format (which has many accessibility options!), and high-contrast/tactile literacy.
- Include books and resources representing people with disabilities and also written by people with a lived disability experience.
- Consider providing a social narrative (or Social Story) to help people of all ages and abilities prepare for a visit or specific program that is new to them (especially helpful for the neurodivergent community, people with PTSD, and dementia).
- Provide a visual schedule during programs and allow time for processing before transitioning to the next activity.
- Avoid visual clutter in backgrounds and printed materials, and use colors with high contrast (e.g., yellow and black).
- Avoid audio clutter, such as background music and loud alert tones on computers, which may be over-stimulating.
- Dim bright lights or cover fluorescent lighting with filters and provide noise-canceling headphones in case of sensory overwhelm.
- Use a microphone when possible.
- Whatever virtual resource you use, confirm that it has closed captions, the specific closed caption format, and that you know how to turn it on if a patron asks for technical assistance.
- Provide adaptive alternatives (movement or art supplies) so that participants can choose what works for them without having to make special requests.
- If possible, identify a quiet space or room with some sensory calming devices for patrons experiencing sensory overwhelm. Devices can include items for sensory seekers (e.g., fidgets, weighted lap pads) and sensory avoiders (e.g., pop-up tents, headphones).
- Avoid flashing lights, loud content, or sudden movements, or provide warning in advance.
- Provide different seating options that allow space for wheelchairs, walkers, and/or strollers.
- If providing food items, avoid items with common allergens (e.g., nuts, gluten, dairy), and list food items in advance. Provide alternatives. You can also ask families to identify any food allergies when they register for a program.
- Provide concise instructions in multiple formats (i.e., visuals, demonstration, video, and written). Consider combining written with visual instructions.
- Provide verbal description of visuals, illustrations, and speakers.
- Consider providing tactile manipulatives and other sensory tools to engage the senses.
- When using a sign language interpreter, address the person you are conversing with and not the interpreter.

TIP:

Less is usually best when presenting a PowerPoint. However, if you have hearing-impaired patrons (or visual learners), word-for-word descriptions of what you are saying can act as real-time subtitles.

- All marketing should include an accommodations statement, such as whether an event is wheelchair accessible, held in a low-stimulation space, or that an ASL interpreter will be present. Also consider providing accommodations in advance so people do not need to make special requests.

RESOURCES

Project READY: https://ready.web.unc.edu/

Project ENABLE: https://projectenable.syr.edu/

Style guide from *National Center on Disability and Journalism*: https://ncdj.org/style-guide/)

"Literacy for Youth with Low Vision" from *Adaptive Umbrella*: https://bit.ly/3tVtuUq

Social narrative resources from *Libraries and Autism: We're Connected*: http://librariesandautism.org/ne-wresources.htm

"What Is a Social Story?" from *Carol Gray Social Stories*: https://bit.ly/3yeCF5b

"Social Story" from *Deerfield Public Library*: https://deerfieldlibrary.org/socialstory/

"What Is a Visual Schedule?" from *Adaptive Umbrella*: https://bit.ly/3QFXZaF

"Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion" from *ALA*: https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity

"Virtual Storytime Services Guide" from *ALSC*: https://bit.ly/3yaPygj