READING AND LITERACY FOR ALL:

EARLY YEARS LITERACY
PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Read QUALITY ASSURANCE

STATE LIBRARY VICTORIA

Public Libraries Victoria Network

CREATIVE VICTORIA

Contents

Introduction

Reading and literacy for all: A strategic framework for Victorian public libraries 2015–18 describes the unique role of public libraries in reader and literacy development. Jointly developed by State Library Victoria and Victoria's network of 47 municipal library services and regional library corporations, the framework provides an overview of current library programs, identifies shared priorities for action to support improvement in reading and literacy outcomes, and establishes a robust approach to evaluating the impact of public libraries on Victorians' reading and literacy levels.

In developing the strategic framework through the 2014–15 Statewide Public Library Development Projects, Victoria's public libraries also sought to develop a flagship early years literacy program. The branded program will target all Victorian children aged between zero and eight years, and seek to engage children and their families in building early literacy skills and encouraging a love of reading. The program will unite early years literacy services across Victorian public libraries and contain multiple elements, including a toolkit of early literacy and reading resources that target children, parents (children's first teachers) and library staff who work in the children's services domain.

Victorian public libraries and relevant stakeholders were engaged in a consultative process to:

- identify and document local, national and international best-practice reading and literacy programs for children aged between zero and eight years
- define each element of the program and clearly articulate the brand proposition
- scope and cost any new elements of the program
- develop evaluation tools to measure the impact of the program
- recommend an advocacy strategy for the program.

Drawing on the research and consultation conducted in developing the *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework, and within the context of that framework, this report provides recommendations and guidance on statewide early years literacy programming for Victoria's public libraries.

Literacy is much more than an educational priority – it is the ultimate investment in the future.

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova

Early years literacy: the challenge

Literacy is an essential life skill for Victorians of all ages. It is fundamental to all learning, a building block of education and development, and integral to economic, civic and social participation.

While Victorians' performance on key literacy measures is as good as our national peers', it has shown little sign of improvement over the past decade. At the same time, literacy levels in the world's top-performing nations are improving rapidly.

Early learning participation in Australia is among the lowest in the developed world. Recent increases in investment in early childhood education have not yet resulted in high levels of early childhood participation. Only 18 per cent of three-year-old Australians participate in early childhood education, compared with an OECD average of 70 per cent. (Australia ranks 34th of 36 OECD countries.)

Data from the Australian Early Development Census indicates that 16 per cent of Victorian children of pre-school age are developmentally 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' in the domains of language and cognitive skills. While other states showed improvement, there was limited change in Victoria between 2009 and 2012.

Parents and carers are a child's first teachers, and the home environment (in particular the extent to which children acquire literacy skills and habits from the adults raising them) is the key to early childhood literacy. Children who are read to six or seven times a week have a literacy level almost a year ahead of children who are not read to at home. However, not all children have parents who are able to read to them or can afford to purchase books or provide them with literacy-based activities. Children from poorer families and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are most at risk of starting school with fewer literacy prerequisites.

Children who start school behind typically stay behind: if a child is a poor reader at the end of Year 1, there is a 90 per cent chance that they will still be a poor reader at the end of Year 4. It is therefore imperative that children be actively supported in their language and literacy development and encouraged from an early age to love reading. Beyond the direct literacy benefits, reading contributes positively to personal wellbeing, health, social and economic outcomes.

Libraries and early years literacy

Public libraries have a natural advantage in supporting reader and literacy development. Libraries are, and always have been, places of and for learning – places that promote and encourage a culture of reading by providing universal access to books and related programs for people of all ages and interests.

Public libraries are free, open to all and widely accessible across the state. They have rich collections, active and engaging programs, and staff who actively encourage and support library users to read, access information and improve their language and digital literacy skills. The combined power of these factors underpins the strength of the public library network as an agent for improving reading and literacy outcomes in ways that other organisations or networks cannot.

Current early years literacy activities

Victoria's public libraries have a long history of supporting early years literacy development. An audit of libraries' reading and literacy programs, conducted in developing the strategic framework, found that every Victorian public library (including State Library Victoria) runs storytime or equivalent programs; every week around 15,000 pre-school children and their parents or carers participate in these programs. Public libraries and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services are among the few agencies helping parents to be effective first teachers for their children.

Across the library network there is on offer a vast array of (engagingly named and themed) programs targeted at children of different ages – from Born to Read Story Time and Bookaroo (for babies aged from birth to six months) to Baby Bounce, Rhyme Time, Tiny Tots Story Time, Stompers, Toddler Tales, generic storytime, Chinese Story Time, Auslan Story Time, iTots, YouTube Story Time, Weekend Story Time (for children with working parents) and Bedtime Story Time (for pre-schoolers and their school-age siblings).

Every library offers storytime programs in response to the profile and needs of its local community and its available resources, and there are many variants in terms of audience, language, medium and location.

Libraries' storytime programs:

- typically feature a book-based activity where the presenter reads a story and/or rhymes to the children attending

- encourage children (and parents and carers) to read or sing along, respond to questions, and so on

- often involve a craft activity

- are of 30 to 60 minutes' duration

- are held weekly, fortnightly or monthly

- are targeted at children of different ages, subject to library resources and demand

- are mainly held at the library, but may be conducted in other community settings (for example, Neighbourhood Houses, primary schools, Puckapunyal Army Base)

- cater for 10 to 200 participants, subject to location, capacity and demand.

Through these programs libraries encourage adults to read to children, and make a real contribution to early years literacy development, especially where they engage families and communities that have low levels of literacy.

Best practice in early years literacy

Research in the field of early literacy development has led to a new understanding of best practice for public libraries that want to help children and their parents and carers get ready to read. This includes recognition of the following factors in design, development and delivery of early years programs.

Pre-reading skills	Many libraries are now focusing on six key pre-literacy skills to determine whether the storytime programs they deliver fully support literacy development.
Parental involvement	Best-practice approaches encourage staff to model reading behaviours for parents and help them to better understand how they can develop their child's literacy skills.
Outreach	Best-practice libraries are taking their programs into the community, to where the children are, and to families who may not use libraries.
Collaboration	Greater emphasis is being placed on collaboration with partner organisations to develop innovative programs that optimise reach, engagement and impact on early years literacy.
Training and support	Professional development and training in literacy support for library staff is recognised as having a positive impact on literacy behaviours and library programming.
Learning environment	Physical design features in a learning environment (be it formal or informal) are understood to support young children's literacy engagement and subsequent achievement.
Multilingualism	Libraries recognise bilingualism and multilingualism as an asset, and support children to maintain their first language(s) and learn English as an additional language.

See Appendix A for resources and more information about early years best practice.

Stakeholder perspectives

The *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework was developed with input from stakeholders within and outside the library sector, recognising the important roles of different individuals and organisations in improving early years literacy outcomes. Beyond the library sector this included the Department of Education and Training, MCH services, welfare agencies, and associations with explicit interest in early years literacy.

This consultation highlighted several key points about early years literacy and the role of public libraries in supporting literacy development.

- Public libraries are an integral part of early years literacy development by virtue of their reach, programs, collections and widespread acceptance within communities. Their programs are well-known and participants express a high level of satisfaction.

- There is a perception (in some libraries contrary to the evidence) that public libraries' early years programming is 'preaching to the converted', in that it typically attracts families with good levels of literacy, who have books in the home and good reading behaviours. The challenge for libraries is to more consistently reach out and engage families with lower literacy levels and those for whom English is an additional language. For example, The Smith Family's Let's Read program is targeted at families participating in its Learning for Life program, which supports 6,500 highly disadvantaged families in 14 of Victoria's lowest SES areas.

- With total statewide weekly attendance at storytime programs of around 15,000 (mainly pre-schoolers aged three to five years) and a Victorian population of around 400,000 children aged under five years (approximately 65,000 per yearly cohort), libraries currently engage a relatively small proportion of the potential target audience (perhaps as little as 10 per cent of children in the three-to-five age group).

- Libraries do not currently have the financial, human or physical resources to upscale their programs to meet the potential demand.

- Libraries' early years activities are seen by participants to be engaging and fun for children and parents and carers. However, there is also a concern among libraries and parts of the wider early years sector that some programs do not sufficiently model good reading behaviour to adults, nor do they have sufficient educational content for the child.

- The Department of Education and Training's Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) sets a clear vision for the role of early years development for all children aged from birth to eight years. It describes eight collaborative, effective and reflective practice principles for learning and development, and defines in detail five key early years learning and development outcomes. Increasing alignment between libraries' early years programming and the VEYLDF would strengthen the actual and perceived integrity and quality of these programs.

Opportunities to support early years literacy

All Victorian public libraries currently offer some form of early years programming – at a minimum, a storytime program for pre-schoolers and their parents and carers.

In seeking to develop a flagship early years literacy program for Victorian public libraries, it is important to understand the current stage of development of these programs, and hence the gaps and the opportunities for advancement.

First, Victoria's public libraries are already very active in this space. There are hundreds of well-loved storytime and equivalent programs engaging thousands of children and parents and carers every week. The library audit found that around 50 per cent of library programs focus on children of pre-school age. Around 50 per cent of libraries also have designated literacy and/or reader development staff (for example, a Children's Services Librarian).

Second, libraries are for the most part very comfortable with the standard of their early years programming. Some libraries acknowledge that there is scope for improvement in the quality and presentation of their programs, but at the same time can cite examples of very good practice.

Third, there are, across the Australian and overseas library sector, some well-founded, research-based early years literacy resources, toolkits and guides that have been trialled and evaluated. Those that have not been developed in an Australian or Victorian educational context could be adapted for use here (for example, through alignment with the VEYLDF and use of local collections and language).

With this generally solid foundation, what then are the gaps that must be addressed and the opportunities that might be seized? Five key points are noted.

1. There is some variability in the standard of current early years programs across the library sector in terms of:
   - whether, in addition to targeting the child they also target the parent or carer and model effective reading behaviours that can be used at home
   - educational underpinning
   - competence of presenters.

2. Libraries do not connect with MCH services, kindergartens and schools in a way that demonstrates the explicit contribution that libraries make to the expected literacy development pathway.

3. There is no evidence or evaluation data to show the impact of library programs on children's literacy levels or school readiness.

4. There are many children and families, including highly disadvantaged families, who do not access libraries' early years programs but who might benefit substantially from participating.

5. The lack of alignment across public libraries in program purpose, quality and impact makes it difficult for the sector to articulate their current contribution and advocate for additional support to realise the potential value of their programs.

With these findings in mind, it is suggested that Victoria's public libraries build on the good work that is already happening across the state and concentrate their energies and resources on two opportunities for strategic improvement.

1. **Quality.** Ensure that Victorian public libraries' early years literacy activities are all of a high quality and can be clearly shown to contribute to improving literacy outcomes for children who participate.

2. **Alignment.** By ensuring consistency in provision across public libraries, enable the Victorian public library sector to speak confidently about the value it adds to literacy outcomes and encourage more young Victorians and their families to engage with and benefit from these programs.

This approach will provide a strong base from which public libraries can together develop new elements of their literacy programs that are responsive to the needs of children and families and that align with other services and programs provided through the Victorian early years sector, and with relevant Commonwealth and State government policy. This approach is more efficient and can be delivered more quickly than developing an additional custom-built early years literacy program as exists in public libraries in some other jurisdictions.

Recommendations

Victoria's network of public libraries can best position itself as a key player in early years literacy that is ready and able to upscale its programs to meet expected and potential demands across the state by adopting the following approach.

1 | Establish an industry-agreed, stakeholder-endorsed quality framework that articulates minimum and best-practice standards for public libraries' early years literacy programs.

2 | Provide targeted support for program development and professional learning to enable all Victorian public libraries to operate effectively at or above the agreed minimum standard.

3 | Develop a single statewide brand under which individual libraries can conduct early years programs that meet the agreed standards and reflect local community priorities and library resources.

4 | Implement a single evaluation framework that measures the impact of library programs on family reading behaviours, children's literacy and school readiness, and provide this data as an advocacy tool for public libraries.

5 | Develop strategic alliances and partnerships at state and local level with key early years learning organisations and community providers.

6 | Promote and raise awareness of libraries' quality early years programs through a launch event or statewide roll-out.

7 | Advocate with authority and confidence the integral role of public libraries in addressing one of the nation's major social challenges.

1. Quality framework

Public libraries should establish an industry-agreed, stakeholder-endorsed quality framework that articulates minimum and best-practice standards for libraries' early years literacy programming. Implementation of this framework will assure public libraries, their partners and major stakeholders, and the community that the library programs young children and parents regularly attend are not only fun, but also explicitly contribute to improved literacy outcomes.

The research and consultation conducted in developing the *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework indicated that libraries' early years programs should exhibit the following features, which have been identified as being either 'common' or 'variable'. 'Common' features are standard, or non-negotiable (and therefore integral to the minimum standard); 'variable' features are those for which there is scope for libraries to take different approaches (in order to respond appropriately to local needs and circumstances).

EARLY YEARS LITERACY QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Common *(standard)* **features**

- Encourage a love of reading and words
- Target and involve both children and their parents and carers
- Fun for all participants
- Competent, passionate presenters
- Story-based (high-quality books and resources)
- Sound educational underpinning (in line with VEYLDF's practice principles and learning and development outcomes)
- Model effective reading behaviours to children and their parents and carers
- Facilitate access to library collections
- Raise wider awareness of library offerings
- Transparently complement and do not duplicate the work of other agents (e.g. MCH services, kindergartens, schools)
- Clear outcomes, measures and benchmarks

Variable *(local programming)* **features**

- Respond to local community demographics, skills and needs
- Mode of delivery (e.g. size of group; location – onsite/ outreach; timing; complementary activities; delivery onsite/ online)
- Resourcing and staffing levels

Each of these features can be described in greater detail for assessment purposes (see Appendix B: Early years quality framework). This quality framework will be developed by the library sector and will be reviewed as necessary with relevant stakeholders and partners to ensure that it represents a thorough and up-to-date statement of minimum and best-practice standards in early years literacy programs for public libraries. For example, libraries will discuss the educational standard in the framework with the Department of Education and Training. Reviews will ensure that items in the checklist are consistent with the National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care.

Once the framework is agreed by the library sector, it is expected that every Victorian public library will conduct a peer-reviewed self-assessment of its current early years programs. State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network will be responsible for overseeing the assessment process. It is expected that some libraries will already meet or exceed the minimum standards, while others may be at the minimum level for some but not all of the 'common' criteria.

The collective results of these assessments will:

- provide a clear statement on the current quality of libraries' early years programs
- indicate priorities for statewide and local investment in program development and professional learning.

To ensure that the expected standard is maintained each library will be required to reassess its programs every two years (from the date of having initially reached the minimum standard).

2. Targeted support for libraries

Not all libraries will, in the first instance, be able to demonstrate that their programs meet the minimum standard, and the Victorian public library sector will need to make an initial and collective investment in the quality of early years programs. In practice this will mean that resources for statewide library development are targeted at libraries that do not yet meet the newly defined levels of program quality. This process may be regarded as inequitable – in the sense that some libraries will receive more support than others (which have already invested in their programs and meet the standard). However, it is necessary in the short-term if the public library sector as a whole is to realise the longer-term benefits of having a uniform statewide minimum standard.

Subject to the outcomes of libraries' self-assessment of their early years activities, probable areas for professional learning (such as training and community of practice) and program and resource development (such as checklists and guides) include:

- program design to meet the educational requirements of the standard
- program design to ensure appropriate recognition of the needs and interests of both children and their parents and carers
- professional learning for presenters
- partnership development with local MCH services, kindergartens and schools
- community engagement and outreach to connect with children and families with low-level reading and literacy skills.

Some of this activity may be supported through the triennial Statewide Public Library Development Projects 2014–17.

3. Branding

Victoria's public libraries should agree on a single brand for use with any early years activities that libraries deliver that meet the agreed standard. The brand (similar to eSmart Libraries accreditation or the Heart Foundation's 'tick') will signify that the programs offered are at or above the agreed quality standard. Libraries will be free to retain current program names familiar to and loved by their communities – the programs will simply have an accompanying 'tick'. Clear identification of branded programs will also allow for aggregation of information on programs across different library services (such as the number of children and parents that attend quality-branded storytime programs per week).

4. Evaluation

If Victoria's public libraries agree upon and implement a statewide minimum standard for early years literacy activities they will be in a much more powerful position to evaluate the quality, reach, uptake and impact of those programs, and to use this information for strategic and advocacy purposes. Sample indicators follow.

Indicator	Measure
Quality	• Percentage of public libraries that have quality (branded) programs that meet the early years literacy minimum standards (target 100 per cent) • Average number of quality early years library programs delivered in Victoria each week
Uptake	• Number of children participating in quality early years library programs each week • Parent/carer feedback and satisfaction with early years library programs
Reach	• Percentage of children aged 0 to 5 years who regularly attend quality early years library programs
Impact	• Percentage of children aged 0 to 5 years who are read to every day • Percentage of children who start school 'at risk' or 'developmentally vulnerable' in the domains of language and communication • Percentage of children who are ready to start school (as assessed by primary teachers)

It is understood that libraries are just one change agent in a complex and dynamic environment, and the interpretation of data against the suggested Impact indicators will take this into account.

5. Partnerships

Public libraries can strengthen their role as key players in early years literacy development by engaging more strategically with Commonwealth and State government policy and with other services and programs provided through the Victorian early years sector. State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria Network can establish more formal relationships with government departments and other peak bodies. At a local level public libraries, with the support of Public Libraries Victoria Network, can strengthen their connections with schools, kindergartens, Neighbourhood Houses, MCH services, local government and other key early years learning organisations.

6. Promotion

Stakeholders within and outside the public library sector say that Victoria's public libraries have every right to be proud of the contribution they make to early years literacy development. The combination of a statewide quality framework, adopted by all public libraries, which can be shown to enhance a range of literacy and behavioural outcomes, will attract further endorsement.

In promoting and raising awareness of the work of public libraries there are several notable milestones:

- **industry agreement** to a stakeholder-endorsed branded quality framework

- **sector-wide sign up** to and achievement of the agreed minimum quality standard (that is, when the final public library is assessed as having reached the quality standard)

- **release** of the first evaluation statistics from the statewide program.

7. Advocacy

Public libraries already make a significant contribution to early years literacy in Victoria. However, their ability to advocate for additional industry support is undermined by disaggregation of activity (by virtue of the nature of public libraries) and a lack of alignment in intent and service quality. The proposed approach removes those barriers, and will give Victoria's public libraries the authority and confidence to more forcefully advocate their position. Most importantly, when public libraries are able to present compelling evidence about the impact of their programs they will be better placed to help more Victorian children improve their literacy and be school-ready.

Priorities for action

Every year Victoria's public libraries play an integral role in early years literacy development for tens of thousands of children and families. However, if all young Victorians are to have the best opportunities in learning and life then more children need to be developing basic literacy skills from an early age and reaching school ready to learn. This is especially true for children from disadvantaged areas and families with low English-language literacy levels. Public libraries can reach more of these children through services provided in and outside of the library.

Victorian public libraries' *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework anticipates a greater degree of alignment in libraries' early years programming; and that the sector positions itself as a key player in early years literacy that is ready and able to upscale programs to meet expected and potential demands across the state.

The proposition described here outlines the key elements of a more integrated and authoritative sector-wide approach to early years literacy programming that can be implemented over the next two years. To enable this approach to be most efficiently implemented, in the short-term public libraries should concentrate action in several key areas.

Recommendation	Action
1. Quality framework	• Victoria's public libraries establish an industry-agreed stakeholder-endorsed quality framework that articulates minimum and best-practice standards in libraries' early years literacy programming. • Every public library assesses its current early years literacy programs against the agreed framework. • Every public library articulates a plan to meet or exceed the agreed minimum standards by no later than December 2016.
2. Targeted support	• Public Libraries Victoria Network establishes training and development programs to support libraries in reaching (and preferably surpassing) the agreed minimum standards in the framework. Priority areas for support will be identified through assessment against the agreed framework.
3. Branding	• Public Libraries Victoria Network engages relevant support to develop a statewide brand and associated imaging for its early years literacy activities.
4. Evaluation	• Public Libraries Victoria Network collects, analyses and publishes evaluation information on the quality, uptake, reach and impact of its early years library programs.
5. Partnerships	• Public Libraries Victoria Network and State Library Victoria establish a formal relationship with the Department of Education and Training to identify and progress action on areas of mutual interest in relation to early years literacy programming.
6. Promotion	• Public Libraries Victoria Network and State Library Victoria raise awareness of the contribution they make to Early Years literacy development through the use of the statewide brand and associated images, the promotion of the sector-wide achievement of the agreed quality standards and the release of the first evaluation results.
7. Advocacy	• Using results from the agreed evaluation framework the Public Libraries Victoria Network and State Library Victoria provide data as an advocacy tool for public libraries.

In support of this approach to addressing an issue of ongoing national, state and local importance Victoria's public libraries should seek additional funding support from all levels of government, and from business and philanthropic organisations.

References and bibliography

American Academy of Pediatrics, *Books Build Connections toolkit*, retrieved from https://littoolkit.aap.org/about/Pages/home.aspx

American Library Association and Association for Library Service to Children 1989 (revised 2009), *Competencies for librarians serving children in public libraries*, retrieved from www.ala.org/alsc/edcareeers/alsccorecomps

American Public Library Association and Association for Library Service to Children 2004 (revised 2011), *Every child ready to read @ your library*, retrieved from www.everychildreadytoread.org/about

August, D & Shanahan, T 2006, *English language learners: Developing literacy in second-language learners* — Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth, retrieved from http://jlr.sagepub.com/content/41/4/432.full.pdf

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2014, *NAPLAN Achievement in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2014*, retrieved from http://www.nap.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Assessment_Program_Literacy_and_Numeracy_national_report_for_2014.pdf

Australian Library and Information Service and Public Libraries Advisory Committee 2014, *Early literacy framework and strategy for Australian public libraries*, retrieved from www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/advocacy/ALIA-PLAC-Early-Literacy-Framework-Strategy.pdf

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2011, *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*, retrieved from www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf

Department of Education and Training, Australian Early Development Census, www.aedc.gov.au/data

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2007, *Early childhood literacy and numeracy: Building good practice*, report prepared by Fleer, M & Raban, B, retrieved from www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/documents/earlyyears/buildinggoodpractice.pdf

Diamant-Cohen, B, & Hetrick, MA 2013, *Transforming preschool storytime – A modern vision and a year of programs*, ALA Editions, retrieved from www.alastore.ala.org/pdf/DiamantCohenTPS_sample.pdf

Families NSW, *Early Words toolkit*, retrieved from earlywords.info/toolkit/

Hill, S (no date), *Building literacy before school: The Little Big Book Club @ your library: Training and development program handbook*, University of South Australia, retrieved from www.lga.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Born_to_Read___Your_Library_-_Handbook.pdf

Hill, S 2006, *Baby Bounce: The Little Big Book Club way to begin literacy for children 0-2 years*, University of South Australia, retrieved from www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/staff/SueHill/Babybounce.pdf

Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse, 'Language and literacy practices', http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/topic.aspx?sid=8

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 2007, *Guidelines for library services to babies and toddlers*, Professional Report 100, retrieved from www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-professional-reports-100

Maclean, J 2008, *Library preschool storytimes: Developing early literacy skills in children*, retrieved from amesburylibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Library-Preschool-Storytimes-Article.pdf

National Centre for Infants, Toddlers and Families, *Zero to Three: Early literacy and language tips and tools*, retrieved from www.zerotothree.org/child-development/early-language-literacy/tips-tools-early-lit-and-lang.html

National Literacy Trust 2009, *Early Reading Connects toolkit*, retrieved from www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources/practical_resources_info/717_archive_resource-early_reading_connects_toolkit_2009

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013, *OECD skills outlook 2013 – First results from the survey of adult skills*, retrieved from skills.oecd.org/documents/SkillsOutlook_2013_Chapter1.pdf

Rolstad, K, Mahoney, K, & Glass, GV 2005, *The big picture: A meta-analysis of program effectiveness research on English language learners*, retrieved from www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~rolstad/Rolstad_etal2005a.pdf

Slavin, RE, & Cheung, A 2005, 'A synthesis of research on language of reading instruction for English language learners', *Review of Educational Research*, 75 (2), 247-284

State Library of Queensland, 'First five forever', retrieved from plconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/children-and-young-people/first-5-forever

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *AusVELS Curriculum English Domain*, retrieved from ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/English/Overview/Rationale-and-Aims

Wilson, K & Katz, M 2009, 'Reading, literacy and auditory-verbal practice', workshop presentation, retrieved from firstyears.org/miles/reading-miles.pdf

Appendix A: Early years best practice and resources

Best practice

Research in the field of children's early literacy development has resulted in new best practices for public libraries that want to help children and their parents and carers get ready to read.

PRE-READING SKILLS

As outlined by Judy MacLean in her report Library preschool storytimes, the last decade has brought a growing consensus on the range of skills that children must have before they can learn to read. These include:

- **print motivation** – thinking that books and reading are fun
- **print awareness** – recognising print and understanding how books work
- **letter knowledge** – understanding that each letter has its own name and sounds
- **vocabulary** – knowing the names of things
- **narrative skills** – being able to tell stories and describe things
- **phonological awareness** – being able to recognise and play with the smaller sounds that make up words.

Many libraries are now focusing on these six pre-literacy skills and exploring whether the storytime programs they deliver support their development. What they have found is that incorporating these early literacy skills does not change the basic nature of the programs, but requires them to explicitly cater for different childhood developmental stages, and to adopt educational practices that are more purposeful, thoughtful and deliberate.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Research shows that public libraries have a unique opportunity to promote school readiness through parental involvement by training the trainer. Libraries can help parents and carers learn how to help their children develop literacy skills by providing training, information and support.

Best-practice approaches encourage library staff to model reading behaviours for parents (for example, how to sit, share books and interact with a child); how to ask questions; how to select books; and how to make visits to the library fun for the whole family. Some libraries in the USA are providing workshops for parents to share ideas about current research on early years literacy development and practical examples of how parents can develop a child's literacy skills.

OUTREACH

Go into the community. If public libraries only serve those who come into the library, they are 'preaching to the choir'. These families already know the importance of literacy. To really have an impact, public libraries must go into the community to reach the families who do not go to the library.

Judy MacLean, *Library preschool storytimes*

To reach the growing number of children unable to regularly attend and benefit from library programming, the literature states that libraries must take their programs into the community, to where the children are. This may include childcare centres, schools, community organisations or parks.

COLLABORATION

A greater emphasis is being placed on public libraries collaborating with partner organisations to develop innovative programs that optimise reach, engagement and impact on early years literacy.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

There is evidence that literacy support training for library staff has a positive impact on literacy behaviours and library programming. The Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, recommends a set of core competencies for all children's librarians and other library staff whose primary duties include delivering and advocating library services for children (www.ala.org/alsc/edcareeers/alsccorecomps).

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

There is clear and abundant evidence that certain physical design features in a learning environment (be it formal or informal) support young children's literacy engagement and subsequent achievement. Physical design features, uses of space, and resources, may help to focus and sustain children's literacy activity and provide greater opportunity to engage in language and literacy behaviours. International approaches have seen fit-for-purpose spaces created within public libraries which cater for the differing developmental needs of children aged between zero and eight years, which encourage a fun, interactive atmosphere designed to fuel children's imaginations and instil a lifelong love of reading.

MULTILINGUALISM

Syntheses of research (by August and Shanahan; Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass; and Slavin and Cheung) suggest that, when feasible, children should be taught in their primary language. Maintenance of first language(s) is important for children's identity, wellbeing, communication and learning. Children can successfully learn English as an additional language through quality exposure to English, explicit modelling and language teaching, and with sufficient time to acquire the new language. Best-practice programming in public libraries recognises bilingualism and multilingualism as an asset and supports children to maintain their first language(s) and learn English as an additional language.

Early years toolkits and resources

Books Build Connections toolkit

https://littoolkit.aap.org/about/Pages/home.aspx

This toolkit was developed in the USA to help GPs and paediatricians support their patients – parents, carers and grandparents – to develop good practices for sharing books with children, and through this develop children's language skills and promote future school success. The toolkit includes a range of resources that could also be used by librarians; for example, Resources for talking about reading with families with low literacy levels. Links are provided to organisations and websites offering useful information to practitioners who promote early years literacy. This includes the website of the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL), which offers resources for those who work with children under the age of five who have identified disabilities or developmental delays and are at risk for poor outcomes.

Every child ready to read @ your library

www.everychildreadytoread.org/about

This toolkit was developed by the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children in the USA to educate parents to nurture pre-reading skills in their children. The tool is informed by early years research and went through a rigorous process of development – including pilot testing with families. Six years after the initial release of the toolkit in 2004 a detailed evaluation found that Every Child Ready to Read was well regarded and considered to be a high-quality product that has an impact on parent behaviour. A second edition was released in 2011.

The toolkit provides a variety of branded supporting materials that have been developed for the US market. If this material were to be adopted by Victorian public libraries it would need to be customised for the Australian environment.

Early Reading Connects family involvement toolkit: Encouraging a love of language, stories and reading (birth to 5)

www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources/practical_resources_info/717_archive_resource-early_reading_connects_toolkit_2009

The UK National Literacy Trust developed this toolkit to support those working with children under the age of five. It brings together easy-to-access resources and ideas from a wide range of early years organisations, settings and practitioners to help those working with young children to encourage a love of language, stories and reading amongst babies, toddlers and young children; engage and involve the

children's families in this process; share good practice and resources; and build their confidence in supporting children and their families.

Early Words toolkit: Prepare your child from birth for reading and writing

earlywords.info/toolkit/

This NSW toolkit is targeted at parents but has many resources that will also be useful for librarians. The Early Words development team included an occupational therapist, a primary school teacher and a speech pathologist, and has drawn on expertise from paediatricians, early childhood educators and other early literacy projects. The Early Words five top tips gives help across nine developmental stages, with looking and listening; talking; singing and rhyming; reading; and drawing and writing.

First 5 Forever

plconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/children -and-young-people/first-5-forever

First 5 Forever (formerly Best Start) is a universal family literacy program aimed at supporting stronger language and literacy environments for children from birth to five years and their families. Its key goals are to support parents and primary caregivers to be their child's first and most important teachers, and to provide increased access to resources they need through public libraries. A number of fact sheets have been developed to support implementation of the program, such as 'Story Time', 'Key Messages for Parents and Primary Caregivers', and 'Baby Rhyme Time'. A downloadable video for library staff provides an overview of a storytime session.

Guidelines for library services to babies and toddlers

www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-professional-reports-100

The purpose of these guidelines developed through the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is to help public libraries in various countries to implement high-quality children's services. The guidelines are intended as a tool for both trained and inexperienced librarians who have the responsibility of serving families with babies and toddlers. The guidelines cover issues such as materials and selection criteria, environment, evaluation, and best practices from across the world. Section Three provides a checklist against which libraries can assess their services for babies and toddlers.

Transforming preschool storytime: A modern vision and a year of programs

www.alastore.ala.org/pdf/DiamantCohenTPS_sample.pdf

This manual was written by two librarians working in public libraries in the USA. It is based on the premise that children learn best through repetition, and that the best way to forge new connections in the brain is by building on something that is already learned. The manual examines ways to use books creatively but repetitively in preschool storytime programs, and provides sample sessions, book and activity recommendations, resource lists and extension suggestions. The first section provides an introduction to the theory and research into how children learn, and shows how this understanding can be used to transform preschool storytime.

Zero to Three: Early literacy and language tips and tools

www.zerotothree.org/child-development/early -language-literacy/tips-tools-early-lit-and-lang.html

Zero to Three is a nonprofit organisation in the USA that provides parents, professionals and policymakers with the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development in children. Its mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life. 'Early literacy and language tips and tools' provides a range of resources promoting early literacy and language skills in very young children.

OTHER RESOURCES

Baby Bounce: The Little Big Book Club way to begin literacy for children 0-2 years, by Susan Hill (University of South Australia): www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/staff/SueHill/Babybounce.pdf

Building literacy before school: The Little Big Book Club @ your library: Training and development program handbook, by Susan Hill (University of South Australia): www.lga.sa.gov.au/webdata/ resources/files/Born_to_Read___Your_Library_-_Handbook.pdf

Competencies for librarians serving children in public libraries (Association for Library Services to Children, a division of the American Library Association): www. ala.org/alsc/edcareeers/alsccorecomps

Early childhood literacy and numeracy: Building good practice (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations): www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/ documents/earlyyears/buildinggoodpractice.pdf

Early literacy framework and strategy for Australian public libraries (Australian Library and Information Service, Public Libraries Advisory Committee): www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/ advocacy/ALIA-PLAC-Early-Literacy-Framework-Strategy.pdf

Appendix B: Early years literacy quality framework

The *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework recommends that public libraries establish an industry-agreed, stakeholder-endorsed quality framework that articulates minimum and best-practice standards for libraries' early years literacy programs.

It is expected that every Victorian public library will strive to attain and maintain these standards. This will assure public libraries, their partners and major stakeholders, and the community that the library programs young children and parents regularly attend are not only fun, but also explicitly contribute to improved literacy outcomes.

The research and consultation conducted in developing the *Reading and literacy for all* strategic framework indicated that libraries' early years programs should exhibit the following features, which have been identified as being either 'common' or 'variable'. 'Common' features are standard, or non-negotiable (and therefore integral to the minimum standard); 'variable' features are those for which there is scope for libraries to take different approaches (in order to respond appropriately to local needs and circumstances).

EARLY YEARS LITERACY QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Common *(standard)* **features**

- Encourage a love of reading and words
- Target and involve both children and their parents and carers
- Fun for all participants
- Competent, passionate presenters
- Story-based (high-quality books and resources)
- Sound educational underpinning (in line with VEYLDF's practice principles and learning and development outcomes)
- Model effective reading behaviours to children and their parents and carers
- Facilitate access to library collections
- Raise wider awareness of library offerings
- Transparently complement and do not duplicate the work of other agents (e.g. MCH services, kindergartens, schools)
- Clear outcomes, measures and benchmarks

Variable *(local programming)* **features**

- Respond to local community demographics, skills and needs
- Mode of delivery (e.g. size of group; location – onsite/ outreach; timing; complementary activities; delivery onsite/ online)
- Resourcing and staffing levels

To support public libraries (individually and collectively) in assessing the quality of their early years programs, and to encourage ownership of the strategic framework, the library sector will need to define minimum standards against each component. An audit checklist will enable every library to assess its own programs.

In its simplest form the audit checklist might look like the one provided here. The number of requirements under each standard will vary depending upon the nature of the standard. The number of assessment levels might vary from two (meets/does not meet) to five (for example, exceeds/fully meets/substantially meets/partially meets/does not meet).

EARLY YEARS LITERACY QUALITY CHECKLIST: COMMON (STANDARD) FEATURES

Requirement	Assessment	Notes
	F – Fully meets P – Partially meets	(incl. areas for improvement)
1. Encourages a love of reading and words		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
2. Targets and involves both children and their parents and carers		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
3. Fun for all participants		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
4. Competent, passionate presenters		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
5. Story-based		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
6. Sound educational underpinning		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
7. Models effective reading behaviours to children and their parents and carers		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	

Requirement	Assessment	Notes
	F – Fully meets P – Partially meets	(incl. areas for improvement)
8. Facilitates access to library collections		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
9. Raises wider awareness of library offerings		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
10. Transparently complements and does not duplicate the work of other agents		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
11. Clear outcomes, measures and benchmarks		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	

EARLY YEARS LITERACY QUALITY CHECKLIST: VARIABLE (LOCAL PROGRAMMING) FEATURES

Requirement	Assessment	Notes
	F – Fully meets P – Partially meets	(incl. areas for improvement)
12. Responds to local community demographics, skills and needs		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
13. Mode of delivery		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	
14. Resourcing and staffing levels		
a)	F / P	
b)	F / P	
c)	F / P	

Sound educational underpinning

Library Service Managers and Children's Services Librarians are generally well aware of the characteristics of effective early years programs. One area where this knowledge may not be as well advanced is in the extent to which library programs reflect contemporary educational practice in early childhood. In this context it is important that development of the minimum standards includes engagement with the Department of Education and Training and acknowledge the practice principles and outcomes defined in the VEYLDF (which in turn is consistent with the National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care).

In this context the following summation of early childhood learning and development from birth to eight years is relevant.

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FROM BIRTH TO EIGHT YEARS

The child	The adult's role in supporting language development
0–12 months	
- Recognises familiar voices - Responds to changes in tones - Pays attention to music - Attends to pictures - Recognises familiar objects - Turns pages with help - Vocalises - Pats pictures - Prefers pictures of faces - Imitates speech sounds	- Use animated actions (clapping, blowing kisses, etc.) - Play finger-rhymes - Communicate in language the adult is most comfortable with - Teach turn-taking, which is required for conversation - Talk and explain constantly while doing things (e.g. 'I'm brushing your hair') - Talk about scenarios (where you are going, what you will do, who you will see) - Make animal sounds relating to pictures - Provide a variety of board books with large, bright, simple illustrations
1–2 years	
- Likes to carry and hold own book - Turns pages - Points to and names familiar objects - Learns that words have meaning - Corrects book orientation - Asks for books to be read - Fills in words 'Reads' aloud - Recites familiar passages (e.g. parts of a rhyme) - Attention span fluctuates - First words emerge at 10–14 months, progressing to 20–100 words at 18 months - Begins to scribble	- Talk about what you are doing - Point out familiar objects while going for walks or outings - Model simple but grammatical speech that the child can imitate - Introduce 'phonemic awareness' through 'Sound Walks' and other sound activities: - The clock says t-t-t - Blow away the feather by biting the bottom lip f-f-f - The plane goes v-v-v - Make the b-b-b sound against a blown up balloon - Touch your throat to feel the motor sound of a car r-r-r (and expand on the words – 'Car. That's right. It's a car. A big red car.' - Read daily (ideally books with large pictures and one or two words or a simple phrase or sentence) - Take time to talk about the picture on each page, and get the child to point to objects in the picture that you name - Ask the child to name the objects that you point to

The child	The adult's role in supporting language development
2–3 years	
• Learns to turn paper pages • Searches for favourite pictures • 'Reads' to self • Coordinates text with picture • Protests when adult gets a word wrong • Recites phrases and may recite stories • Starts to name black-and-white pictures • Enjoys rhymes • Enjoys having favourite books read over and over again • Knows that books have a back and front • Knows how to hold books • Starts to become aware of directionality of words (left to right) • Listens and enjoys when read to for 5 to 15 minutes • Has a vocabulary of about 300 words at two years • Can talk about unrelated ideas in a story • Is starting to develop some sequence in their story	• Provide a range of books, including those with black-and-white illustrations and pictures • Talk about family pictures in an album • Read books with repetitive phrases or rhymes • Point to words when reading • Use different tones for different characters • Re-read favourite books, often • Teach rhymes and songs with a catchy chorus • Have a special spot to sit and read without distraction • Help children in retelling their story
3–4 years	
• Places more importance on plot • Still enjoys some books repeatedly • Listens to longer books • Retells familiar stories • Is starting to track text with finger • 'Writes' name • Begins to recognise some letters • Turns paper pages one at a time • Creates primitive narratives • Starts scribbling that begins to acquire some of the characteristics of print • Develops speech such that people outside of family understand them • Is able to ask and answer who, what, where questions • Has a vocabulary of around 900 words at 3 years • Starts to show an awareness of print on signs and labels • May recognise several books by the cover and know their titles • Understands concepts of print • May recognise some numbers and letters	• Read, sing, say rhymes • Talk about the day's planned activities • Sort and classify pictures, giving reasons • Point to silly pictures in books or TV, and get the child to talk about what is silly (e.g. a dog driving a car) – separating fact from fiction) • Provide books that have a simple plot • Talk about the story line • Help the child to re-tell the story • Act out using props, dress-ups, puppets • Talk about your favourite part of the story • Ask about their favourite part • Look at family albums and talk about what is happening in the pictures • Ask questions to improve comprehension skills • Act out familiar scenarios (e.g. using a doll's house, role play with dress ups) • Ask the child to repeat what they have said if you don't understand (which shows that the adult values what the child is saying)

The child	The adult's role in supporting language development
4–5 years	

• Continues to broaden skills from the 3–4 year stage
• Continues to make progress in differentiating, identifying and reproducing letters
• Learns to write own name
• Mixes type and scribble (some letters, drawings and squiggles when writing notes and stories)
• Between 4 and 7 years begins trying to spell words they hear and say
• Has a vocabulary of about 1500 words at 4 years of age and about 2500 words at 5 years of age
• Shares narratives that are chunks of unfocused 'chains' (events linked in logical or cause/effect relationships without involving a central character)
• Identifies rhymes
• Segments syllables and counts syllables in words
• Follows instructions
• Can keep a conversation flowing
• Changes tone and talk depending on the audience and venue
	• Use speech and introduce books with ordinal, spatial and opposite language
	• Play games using descriptions, such as 'I Spy', to expand comprehension skills (child can give instructions on a task while the adult follows them)
	• Model exemplary conversation behaviour
	  • getting their attention
	  • paying attention to them
	  • pausing to allow interaction
	• Build up vocabulary by introducing and explaining new words
	• Expand social communication and narration skills through role play, drama, puppets, dress-ups and props
	• Read stories with easy-to-follow plots (help with prediction)
	• Use who, what, when, where, why questions
	• Give two-step instructions
	• Ask open-ended questions
	• Let the child draw a picture and help them to write a sentence under it (leads to the child grasping the power of storytelling)
	• Play board games that are age appropriate (introduces rules, turn-taking, sequence)
	• Include the child in planning and discussing the day's or session's activities

5–8 years	

• Begins to read on their own
• Develops motivation to read independently
• Identifies with characters
• Acquires preferred genres
• Uses previously mastered letter knowledge and phonological awareness skills to decipher patterns in print (i.e. can change 'cat' to 'hat' to 'bat')
• Words that were once recognised as visual gestalt may now be 'read' by attending to beginning and ending letters and knowing the sounds they represent
• Uses correct forms of plurals, verbs and tenses (e.g. homophones rely on the context to work out correct meaning)
• Begin to understand non-literal language
• Beginning to learn conventional spelling rules
• Expressive vocabulary about 2500 at 5 years
• Narrative development at 5 to 6 years consists of focused chains (a central character with a logical sequence of events), and by 7 to 8 years true narratives develop, usually based on personal experiences)
• Generates rhymes, and begins to judge and categorize rhymes
• Blend sounds
• Counts sounds in words
• Identifies beginning and ending sounds
• Begins to delete and substitute sounds and spell phonetically.
	• Provide the opportunity for daily reading to an adult
	• Encourage an interest in reading by
	  • regular visits to the library to borrow books of choice
	  • guidance towards preferred and appropriate genre
	  • discussing characters, plot, predictions
	  • exploring and reading non-fiction texts
	• Introduce child to specific genres and non-fiction texts in a library setting
	• Participate in community programs such as The Premier's Reading Challenge
	• Introduce rhymes in a range of formats
	• Discuss characters and similarities and differences that they can relate to
	• Encourage child to create their own stories (oral, illustrated, written), make up their own text for picture only books, and create their own rhymes
	• Shared reading and interactive reading
	  • enhances language and literacy skills
	  • builds an appreciation of books
	  • supports oral language and vocabulary development
	  • leads to the child becoming the story teller (through multiple reading)
	  • allows for higher level of questioning beyond just naming things
	  • relates the story to their own experience.

PROJECT TEAM

Project sponsor .... Debra Rosenfeldt, State Library Victoria
Project management ... Robyn Ellard and Jayne Cleave, State Library Victoria

Writers .... Ian Phillips and Carol Oxley, I&J Management Services
Editor .... Jane Thompson
Design .... Chocolate Designs

PROJECT WORKGROUP

Tania Barry, Hume Libraries

Natalie Brown, Greater Dandenong Libraries

Anna Burkey, State Library Victoria

Joseph Cullen, Eastern Regional Libraries Corporation

Pam Giumarra, Melbourne Library Service

Jane Grace, Yarra Plenty Regional Library

Chris Kelly, Goldfields Library Corporation (Spokesperson)

Christine McAllister, Brimbank Libraries

Kathie Olden, West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation

Genimaree Panozzo, Moreland City Council

Carole Smith, Darebin Libraries