Early language and literacy in NSW public libraries:

Framework for developing and evaluating early literacy sessions

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Citing this framework:

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This framework is an outcome of Stage 3 of the collaborative research project *Developing a context-sensitive framework for supporting early literacy across NSW public libraries.*

Public libraries in Australia have the capacity to support and promote a stronger focus on early language and literacy development by:

- providing free access to a range of books and other resources

- designing and delivering effective early literacy sessions for babies, toddlers and preschool children and their families

- offering information events for families and childcare educators

- running or participating in programs that include distributing free books for babies and children and other reading materials to families.

According to the Australian Library and Information Association's (ALIA) Early Literacy Group (2011), this capacity is significantly enhanced when libraries act as 'active connectors' – connecting people with resources and programs for supporting early literacy, with each other (e.g. parents and children through literacy experiences such as shared reading), and with other service providers as well as establishing and maintaining partnerships with the early childhood sector. Specifically, knowledge about a library's socio-economic and cultural setting provides a solid foundation on which every public library can build a strong 'active connector' profile by:

- including early literacy in every library's strategic plan
- offering professional development to other agencies
- accepting invitations to other agencies' professional development sessions
- providing resources and making them widely available (e.g. bulk loans for childcare services)
- providing outreach services for people who are vulnerable, hard-to-reach or unable to visit the library
- being actively engaged in creating early literacy programs for babies and toddlers as well as preschoolers
- being active in offering literacy-oriented parenting support
- participating in academic and other research
- collaborating with other libraries to jointly develop resources and programs locally and nationally
- being actively involved in reading and literacy debates
- including early literacy incentives (e.g. free DVDs, books, other materials) as a public library membership bonus.

(Adapted from Australian Library and Information Association's Early Literacy Group, 2011, p. 10)

In line with this vision, State Library of New South Wales established a research partnership with the Institute of Early Childhood (now Department of Educational Studies), Macquarie University with the key aim of supporting public libraries in NSW to be: (1) recognised for the early literacy services many of these libraries already offer; (2) able to evaluate existing early literacy initiatives in public libraries across the state; and (3) supported in designing and implementing effective new early literacy initiatives.

This project's overarching goal is to develop a context-sensitive framework that public libraries across NSW can employ to evaluate existing and develop new early literacy initiatives in ways that effectively respond to the specific needs of their individual socio-economic and cultural settings. To achieve this, the project involved the following processes, organised into three interrelated, and partially overlapping, stages:

Stage 1

1. Conduct a voluntary, anonymous (online) survey of public library staff involved in early literacy initiatives across council-run public libraries in New South Wales in order to collect information about the early literacy initiatives these libraries offer
2. Complete a comprehensive review of research on early literacy practices and development in diverse homes and communities and associated literacy outcomes; the aim of the review is to identify
    i. the prior-to-school literacy competencies and contextual factors (e.g. parental attitudes, socio-cultural and economic background) related to success at school and beyond
    ii. specific practices that support the development of these competencies

Stage 2

3. Perform close observation and analysis of early literacy sessions (ELS) for children from birth to school age and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time, Preschool Storytime) from NSW public library services representing a variety of ELS and library settings across the state
4. Conduct interviews with the presenters of these sessions to gain insight into the decisions library staff make as they engage in preparing and conducting early literacy sessions
5. Conduct a voluntary anonymous (paper-based) survey for parents/caregivers participating in these sessions to gather information about parental levels of education and attitudes and family practices related to early literacy, including attendance and attitudes about ELS

Stage 3

6. Use the findings of the research literature review, the surveys for library staff and for parents/caregivers and the close observation and analysis of early literacy sessions in NSW public libraries to build a context-sensitive framework that includes:
    i. a set of core literacy competencies that all young children should be given opportunities to develop prior to school, which NSW public libraries can use to evaluate their early literacy initiatives
    ii. professional development materials for library staff involved in the design of early literacy initiatives
    iii. guidelines for developing effective early literacy initiatives across different public library settings in NSW that identify the key elements of such programs, supported by examples of programs designed following these guidelines.

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1. Introduction

The 2015 Australian Early Development Census identifies 1 in 5 children starting school as developmentally vulnerable and shows that poor language proficiency contributes significantly to these figures (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016). The latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores, also from 2015, index a significant decline in Australian school students' conventional literacy skills, too, with only 61% of all students, and only 32% of Indigenous students, meeting the National Proficiency Standard in reading (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Underwood, 2017). These results echo robust research evidence of the solid foundation that early language and literacy experiences provide for later reading and academic achievement (Dickinson, 2011; Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010; Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012), and resonate with studies showing that such experiences vary significantly across families and communities (Hart & Risley, 2003; Heath, 1983).

Public libraries across Australia have a history of promoting language and literacy learning from birth as a strategy for overcoming social disadvantage in the communities they serve (Australian Public Library Alliance, 2015). Public libraries are ideally positioned to make a positive contribution to these efforts, as they are "the only government-funded agency available to children from babyhood, providing year-round, free access to resources and services that support reading and literacy" (ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee, 2015 [2011], p. 1). In addition to access to resources such as picture books, DVDs, electronic resources, and toys, public libraries seek to also directly foster early language and literacy learning by offering sessions such as Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time and Preschool Storytime for children aged from birth to the beginning of school and their caregivers. These sessions present opportunities as well as challenges that are specific to public libraries and may be unique to each library setting and its demographic profile. This framework is designed to support library staff in seizing and creating such opportunities and effectively addressing the associated challenges.

Specifically, this framework offers public library staff in NSW a set of guidelines that will support them in developing new and reflecting on and evaluating existing early literacy initiatives, with a strong emphasis on early literacy sessions. These are sessions for children aged from birth to the beginning of primary school and their families, including sessions for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children (e.g. 'Baby Rhyme Time', 'Toddler Time', 'Preschool Storytime'). These sessions, collectively known as 'library storytime', are a cornerstone of services that public libraries in Australia and many other countries around the world provide for young children and their families. In this framework, we use the terms 'early literacy session' and 'storytime' interchangeably.

The framework consists of four main components:

1. Principles for supporting early learning and literacy
2. Library community analysis model
3. Literacy domains: objectives for children's language and literacy learning and strategies library staff as educators can use to support it
4. Tools for planning early literacy sessions at public libraries

Before presenting each of these components in the following sections, this section will outline the motivation behind the framework and its relationship to earlier parts of the project

Developing a context-sensitive framework for supporting early literacy across NSW public libraries.

Table 1. Relationship between project and framework components.

Project components	Scope	Educational principles for supporting early learning and literacy	Library community analysis	Literacy domains: objectives for children and strategies for library staff	Session planning tools
survey of public library staff involved in early literacy initiatives across public libraries in NSW	133 completed surveys		✓		✓
literature review on (1) children's services in public libraries and (2) early language and literacy development	353 research and professional literature sources in the fields of information and library science and language and literacy development	✓	✓	✓	✓
observations and multimodal analyses of early literacy sessions	57 sessions for babies, toddlers and pre-school aged children across 18 library services in NSW (7 in metropolitan and 11 in country NSW)	✓	✓	✓	✓
interviews with public library staff involved in resourcing, planning and presenting the recorded early literacy sessions	42 library staff were interviewed in 38 interviews lasting approximately 40-60 minutes each (incl. 2 group interviews with 2 and 3 interviewees respectively)		✓	✓	✓
survey of caregivers designed to collect information about the children and caregivers who attend early literacy sessions (demographic data, family literacy practices and library use, and attitudes towards ELS)	539 surveys were completed by all but one of the caregivers who attended the sessions video-recorded for the project		✓		✓

In particular, two groups of project participants have made an invaluable contribution to this project:

(1) staff involved in developing and delivering early literacy initiatives across public libraries in NSW; they have informed this framework by:

    a. completing a survey on the nature of early literacy initiatives in their libraries

    b. allowing us to observe and video-record the regular early literacy sessions they present (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)

    c. sharing their experiences in resourcing, designing and presenting early literacy sessions and other early literacy initiatives in public libraries.

(2) caregivers who attended the video-recorded sessions with their children, and completed a survey that provided demographic data about the children and caregivers who attend early literacy sessions, and about family attitudes and practices related to early literacy and library use, including attendance and attitudes about early literacy sessions at public libraries.

Each of these groups is diverse. For example, caregivers may include parents, grandparents, and other close family members, nannies and family day care educators. While this diversity is important to acknowledge, and early literacy sessions must be designed to cater for it, in this framework we refer to any person who brings a child or children to storytime as 'caregiver'.

Staff involved in providing early literacy sessions vary in their qualifications and expertise in library and information science and services as well as in early childhood, early language and literacy development and children's literature. Their professional titles differ too, with only those with university qualifications in library and information science formally qualified as 'librarians'. In this framework, we use the term 'library staff' to refer to any public library staff members involved in providing early literacy sessions. This allows us to acknowledge the professional affiliation and expertise of public library staff, and the unique context, and associated opportunities and challenges, that public libraries provide for promoting early language and literacy in the communities they serve. This term also reflects the aspiration we have for this framework – that it would help others recognise and respect the high professional standards that we believe all good library services for children uphold.

As libraries are a type of educational institution, and early literacy sessions constitute an important community context for early language and literacy learning, library staff involved in providing these sessions are necessarily also educators. In this role, they can make a significant contribution to early learning. When using the term 'educators' to refer to public library staff involved in providing children's services, we take into account an important finding from the analysis of interviews conducted for this project –most early literacy session presenters stressed that they were '*not teachers*' (Djonov & Gill, in preparation). This finding may reflect a concern that treating library staff as 'teachers' may involve imposing on libraries curriculum and assessment requirements like those that operate in formal early childhood education or school settings, or implying that library staff involved in designing and delivering programs for children have or should have the formal training that early childhood educators or teachers have.

Formal assessment of children's learning outcomes or of the performance of library staff as educators, however, would fail to reflect the characteristics of libraries and early literacy sessions as an informal, community-based educational context. First, even among library

staff with vast experience and associated expertise in the design and delivery of early literacy sessions, there are many who do not have qualifications in child development, early language and literacy, or other areas of early childhood. This is despite common expectations that early literacy session presenters can act 'as teachers and literacy coaches' (Djonov & Gill, in preparation), and even identify suitable strategies for including children who experience disability. In fact, in Australia, children's librarians are not required to hold such qualifications. Second, the success of early literacy sessions depends on the active and appropriate participation by children and their caregivers alike. Third, these sessions are characterised with high variability in attendance frequency and regularity, group size, children's ages, and who brings children to storytime.

As individual children may attend storytime irregularly, attend sessions designed for an age group younger or older than they are, or even only ever experience one session in their lives, the impact early literacy sessions may have on the literacy skills of children who attend them is difficult to measure. Given that children may vary significantly in their home language and literacy environments, too, the ways in which they participate in early literacy sessions cannot be treated as evidence of the impact of the quality of the presenters' behaviour during these sessions and even their design overall, as suggested in Campana, Mills and Ghoting's (2016) *Supercharged Storytimes: An Early Literacy Planning and Assessment Guide*.

At the same time, the framework presented here is inspired by the central premise of *Supercharged Storytimes* – that two overarching strategies can help library staff design effective early literacy sessions, and thus elevate the professional status of staff involved in storytime and other public library services for children:

(1) adopting foundational principles for promoting early learning and providing quality educational experiences –**engagement**, **community-building**, and **intentionality.**

(2) being guided by **research on early language and literacy**.

2. Principles for supporting early learning, language and literacy

This section outlines the key principles for supporting early language and literacy learning that underpin this framework. It also explains how the tools the framework offers for developing and evaluating early literacy initiatives (especially library storytime) reflect these principles. Section 2.1 focuses on general principles for supporting early learning, and Section 2.2. on supporting early language and literacy.

2.1. Supporting early learning

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009), like many other early years' curricula, reflects an understanding that to support early learning, educators must be guided by several interdependent principles. We introduce these principles under three headings: *engagement, community-building* and *intentionality*.

Engagement

The success of all learning experiences hinges on the engagement of learners. This is why engagement is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of early literacy sessions. Library staff must therefore find ways to engage participants in these sessions and any other early literacy initiatives. This includes creating a welcoming atmosphere for the session filled with positive affect and encouraging active participation during the session. Young children learn best

when they are engaged in play and positive interactions with peers and adults. A routine that includes a welcome and a goodbye song as well as a recognisable structure can also help children and caregivers develop a sense of predictability that allows them to more fully and confidently participate in storytime on a regular basis.

As early literacy sessions aim to encourage borrowing and the engagement of families in literacy practices beyond the walls of the library and beyond storytime, library staff need to foster such a strong engagement with the library and with reading that children and their families carry that engagement into their homes. To achieve this goal, library staff need to develop strong familiarity with their local community: its social, cultural and linguistic composition, the proportion of families with young children in it, and the presence of other, formal and informal, services for children and families.

Community Building

Public libraries' efforts to promote early literacy in the communities they serve can be greatly enhanced by building and maintaining two types of communities:

(1) a community of library patrons and readers who value early literacy and the library as an informal and freely accessible educational context;

(2) a community of peers/colleagues who:

- understand what is involved in supporting children's learning at public libraries, and consequently value the work of the library staff involved in such efforts; and/or

- can provide feedback on existing early literacy initiatives and collaborate to create new ones.

The templates for library community analysis (Section 3) and for planning early literacy sessions (Section 5) included in this framework document are two tools designed to support library staff in building and maintaining these communities. The community analysis will support them in planning early learning and literacy initiatives that meet the interests and needs of children and families in their local community. It can also be used to provide guidance to new library staff members involved in children's services. And written plans for early literacy sessions can be shared with colleagues and provide a springboard for group reflection and constructive peer review.

Intentionality

As educators, library staff need to be intentional in their resourcing, design, delivery and evaluation of initiatives to support early learning. This includes seeking and targeting funding opportunities for providing quality library services for children and their families, building variety into the children's library collection and the books or other resources (e.g. props, music, display and advertising materials, science kits) selected or developed for children's programs. Central to intentionality are four foundational, and interrelated, principles for providing quality learning experiences: having a deliberate and age-appropriate focus; scaffolding; differentiation; and reflexive practice.

Deliberate and age-appropriate focus

For early literacy sessions, library staff can benefit from having **a deliberate focus** on one or two specific early literacy domains when planning and presenting each session. To be able to do that, they need to develop and apply knowledge about both (1) the learning objectives

for children and (2) the strategies library staff as educators can use to help children work towards these objectives.

The planned objectives for children as well as corresponding strategies that library staff as educators can adopt to supporting early learning need to be **age-appropriate**, reflecting an understanding of early language and literacy development. To support library staff in this task, Section 4 of this framework includes a list of objectives for children's learning, and corresponding strategies educators can use to support these objectives for each of the early literacy domains identified in the review of research literature conducted for this project (Djonov, Torr, & Stenglin, 2018):

> (1) phonological awareness
>
> (2) alphabet & letter knowledge
>
> (3) concepts of print
>
> (4) oral language and vocabulary
>
> (5) background knowledge
>
> (6) print motivation.

For each domain, the list of children's learning objectives and educator strategies is organised according to the common age groups targeted by various early literacy sessions at public libraries (birth to 12 months; 12 – 12 months; 2 – 3 years; and 3 – 5 years).

Section 5 of this framework also encourages intentionality by providing a session planning template. Completing the template requires careful consideration not only of objectives for children's language and literacy learning and corresponding educator strategies in relation to specific literacy domains. It also asks library staff to plan for educating caregivers about these domains (i.e. what tips an early literacy session will offer families on how they can support children's growth in these literacy domains). Aiming to make each session a highly effective, self-contained and memorable learning experience is essential in the public library context – where some children may only ever have the chance to attend a single session, and where library staff strive to encourage families to regularly attend future sessions.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is based on the understanding that children's knowledge and skills are built incrementally and require the support of more knowledgeable or experienced others. Applying this principle involves carefully evaluating what children already know or can do – or in the case of libraries, the knowledge and skills children in a target age group can reasonably be expected to already have – and then planning to use modelling strategies (such as repetition) and other support (e.g. props that can help children learn new vocabulary) to allow children to build on their existing knowledge and skills.

Differentiation

Differentiation captures the need to cater for the different levels of knowledge and skills that children bring to the learning context. This is why in their planning, skilful educators include strategies to support learners who find a planned activity difficult as well as strategies to extend the learning of those who may find that same activity too easy. Educators may break down the activity into smaller steps and include more repetition to support those who find the activity too challenging, while adding to the challenge for those learners who find it too

easy. In some cases, educators may provide a completely different task for learners who are struggling with or excelling at a given task. In addition to diverse knowledge and skills, educators also need to consider how they may engage learners with diverse interests. This is also essential for promoting engagement in learning.

The session planning template provided in Section 5 encourages library staff to carefully consider both scaffolding and differentiation as it asks them to plan how each session would unfold and how they may provide additional support to some/younger children while extending the learning of other/older children.

Reflexive practice

Educators who are intentional in their support for early learning engage in **reflexive practice**. They engage in self-reflection and actively seek feedback from others on the effectiveness of the design and delivery of the learning experiences they provide. They then draw on the findings of this evaluation process to improve future learning experiences.

This framework encourages library staff to engage in reflexive practice, in three key ways:

- to source information about the community their library serves, reflect on what it means for promoting early literacy in that community (Section 3 – Library Community Analysis template), and include such information in the professional development of new library staff;

- to consider and make notes about the best ways children in the library's community can be supported to achieve age-appropriate learning objectives across the six literacy domains (Section 4 - Early language and literacy domains: objectives for children's learning and educator/library staff strategies); and

- to reflect on the success of each early literacy session they have designed and/or delivered, and to consider the implications of this evaluation for future planning (Section 5 – Early literacy session planning template).

2.2. Supporting early literacy

As emphasised earlier, to support early literacy, library staff need to have a research-based understanding of early literacy. The literature review on early literacy conducted for this project considered both early literacy development in general and the impact of social, cultural and linguistic diversity on it.

The review revealed first that **contemporary definitions of literacy** have expanded significantly in order to reflect the following understandings:

- *Language and literacy learning support each other* as literacy now includes talking and listening as well as reading and writing.

- *Literacy, like all communication, is multimodal*, and includes engagement not only with written text but also with music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama through print as well as electronic media.

- *Positive dispositions are key to success in language and literacy learning*, as they promote the confidence and attitudes that help children develop a love of reading, writing and other literacy practices.

- *Early literacy is the foundational experiences and knowledge that children build before children learn to read and write.*

- *Early literacy is the responsibility of many people* (families, educators, and communities).
- *Both formal early childhood education settings and informal education contexts such as public libraries can support early language and literacy learning.*

The literature review also identified **six early language and literacy domains/components** as foundational knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for learning to read and write:

(1) **phonological awareness**: children's ability to distinguish different sound patterns (intonation, rhythm, rhyme) and break speech into sound units of different sizes (words; onset-rime; syllables; individual speech sounds/phonemes)

(2) **alphabet and letter knowledge**: knowing the names of the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds

(3) **concepts of print**: understanding how books and print function and their conventions (e.g. how books are organised and handled; print directionality); and the ability to distinguish print from images and understanding that both can (co)construct meaning

(4) **oral language and vocabulary**: knowledge of words and ability to use them and other features of oral language to communicate effectively in different situations

(5) **background knowledge**: knowledge of the physical, biological and social world and human experience in it

(6) **print motivation:** willingness to engage in literacy practices that involve print such as reading and writing.

Amongst these domains, young children's oral language skills and vocabulary reflect their background knowledge, which is essential for reading comprehension. Oral language skills and vocabulary are early predictors of later achievement in both literacy and learning, as language skills are essential for comprehension and meaning-making. Yet, oral language skills and vocabulary as well as background knowledge are often overlooked when children are first taught how to read, in favour of alphabet and letter knowledge. This contributes to gaps in children's oral language and background knowledge that are evident in the preschool years and very difficult to address later.

One essential contribution libraries could make to the development of children's literacy and lifelong academic success is to help expand their oral language skills, including vocabulary, and their knowledge of the world by providing access to wide ranging resources such as stories and non-fiction books as well as a supportive learning environment. The other is to understand that motivation is pivotal and that a love of books develops through access to relevant books *and* participation in rich oral language interactions that are responsive to children's interests.

Finally, when seeking to promote early language and literacy development, educators must consider the impact of various social factors on children's language and literacy learning. In Australia these factors include:

- home literacy environment and social positioning

- gender

- children speaking or learning English as an additional language

- Indigenous Australian children speaking or learning Standard Australian English as an additional dialect.

3. Community analysis for early literacy sessions

To most effectively support their community and each other as professionals, library staff are encouraged to source and reflect on information about the community that their library serves. The Library Community Analysis template presented in Table 2 is designed for this purpose. The children's services team should conduct this analysis annually. This process involves both collecting and updating data about the local community and considering how these data can inform a library's early literacy initiatives.

The first step is to decide on the appropriate level of analysis and scope for data collection. While each local government area (LGA) typically has its own library service, there are also regions where a single library service covers several LGAs. In large or densely populated LGAs, a library service may have several branches. When these branches operate in very different communities, a site-by-site analysis may be more helpful than one that covers the entire LGA. For example, some parts of an LGA may have intergenerational literacy challenges or include many single-parent families, while others do not.

After relevant data have been collected, library staff need to consider implications for their early literacy initiatives. For example, information about local transport options (e.g. bus and train timetables) should be considered when designing the schedule of storytime sessions. And, if a community has one or two dominant languages other than English (LOTE), there may be greater demand for storytime in those languages. Learning more about the local schools or early childcare and education settings can help the team organise visits to the library by Kindergarten teachers and classes, so they become familiar with and appreciate the local library as a resource.

Library staff can use the community analysis when planning early literacy sessions (See Section 5). They may also find the analysis useful in considering what objectives for children's learning and corresponding educator strategies are most suitable for their community (See Section 4).

Table 2. Library community analysis template

Name of Library Service: _____

Public library community features	Description / data	Implications for early literacy initiatives
Location – and relevance to children's use of the library *(ease of access, parking, public transport, shops/competition/other attractions/bookshops)*		
Population size of the area the library serves *(i.e. the catchment for the library)*		
Patronage size *(# library users)*		
Number of children aged 0-5 years in the area the library serves		
Estimated number of parents with children aged 0-5 among patrons		
Dominant LOTE in the community		
Main languages of people learning English as an additional language in the community (*to understand whether materials advertising storytime and advice on early language and literacy need to be translated*)		
Key cultures and religious groups		
Customs/holidays/traditions important for members of the community		
Socio-Economic and Educational Status		

Public library community features	Description / data	Implications for early literacy initiatives
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings in the area: to consider partnerships with early childhood centres		
Primary schools in the community (information from myschool.edu.au on Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), Language Background other than English (LBOTE), school focus areas/programs, key issues identified in Best Start assessments)		
Library facilities for children and their families *(e.g. café, playground, spaces/areas, layout and safety)*		
Existing children's services at the library • Sessions for children aged birth-5 and attendance patterns (who do children usually attend with; how many children do most caregivers usually bring; size of sessions) • Other programs • Resources • Borrowing patterns (popularity of particular sections/books, etc.)		
Other relevant information		

4. Early language and literacy domains: objectives for children's learning and strategies for library staff as educators

This section presents language and literacy objectives for children's learning and corresponding strategies that library staff as educators can use to support this learning. Each table focuses on a specific early language and literacy domain, and is organised according to age:

(1) phonological awareness (Table 3)

(2) alphabet & letter knowledge (Table 4)

(3) concepts of print (Table 5)

(4) oral language and vocabulary (Table 6)

(5) background knowledge (Table 7)

(6) print motivation (Table 8).

The *Learning Objectives for Children* and the *Educator Strategies to Support Children's Learning* overlap, especially in relation to the youngest children. Although the framework is organised according to age, many of the teaching strategies are similar across the age ranges and are relevant to all situations (for example, to model and demonstrate enthusiasm for books and pleasure in reading). The framework has been designed specifically for use in libraries, where the size and composition of the literacy sessions are unknown in advance. For this reason, it is not possible to provide detailed learning objectives and teaching/educator strategies for adult-child interaction.

The term *strategies* refers both to specific approaches and broad practices you may employ in order to help children achieve different language and literacy learning objectives.

The section *Notes specific to my community* will enable you to highlight the linguistic and cultural factors which will influence your plans. To identify these factors, you may draw on The Library Community Analysis (see Section 3) completed by your team.

Please note that we have referred to the person who brings the child(ren) to the library as the *caregiver*. This person could be a parent, grandparent, nanny or other guardian.

4.1. Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is children's ability to distinguish different sound patterns (intonation, rhythm, rhyme) and break speech into sound units of different sizes (words; onset-rime; syllables; individual speech sounds/phonemes).

Table 3 corresponds to Section 4.3 of the Literature Review.

Table 3. Phonological Awareness: Learning objectives for children and corresponding strategies for library staff

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	Birth to 12 months	12 – 24 months	2 – 3 years	3 – 5 years
Literacy learning objectives for children	For children to: Listen to the patterned language of nursery rhymes. Respond physically to the rhythm and beat of rhymes and songs (e.g. kicking legs, moving arms, bouncing).	For children to: Begin to do actions during simple finger games and songs. Vocalise during group songs and rhymes.	For children to: Join in chants of familiar stories and rhymes. Respond physically to action songs and rhymes.	For children to: Act out rhymes in a variety of volumes and speeds (e.g. clapping loudly and softly, or slowly and fast, whispering). Fill in missing word of familiar rhymes.
Educator strategies to support children's learning	Invite caregiver to interact face-to-face with infant. Share "tips" with caregivers on ways to interact with infant.	Use simple rhymes when greeting and farewelling children. Allow plenty of time for children to make transition from one activity to the next.	Read books which involve action words, animal noises, and other playful language. Ask simple questions (e.g. What sound does a dog/cat/snake/other animal make?).	Pause during familiar rhymes, for children to fill in missing word (oral cloze). Ask children to name objects in pictures starting with a particular letter (e.g. b for ball, bat, baby and bottle).
Notes specific to my community:				

4.2. Alphabet and letter knowledge

Alphabet and letter knowledge includes knowing the names of the letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds.

Table 4 corresponds to Section 4.3 of the Literature Review.

Table 4. Alphabet and Letter Knowledge: Learning objectives for children and corresponding strategies for library staff

ALPHABET/ LETTER KNOWLEDGE	Birth to 12 months	12 – 24 months	2 – 3 years	3 – 5 years
Literacy learning objectives for children	Not applicable	Not applicable	For children to: Recognise that there is a connection between words and pictures. Label familiar objects in books.	For children to: (Begin to) Identify some letters (e.g. first letter of one's name). Guess the beginning sound of some words.
Educator strategies to support children's learning			Invite children to name objects in pictures. Have environmental print (e.g. 'Exit' sign; labels; print on packaging) of different kinds visible in library space.	Draw attention to letters on the page. Finger point to some words in books as you read them aloud.
Notes specific to my community:				

4.3. Concepts of print

Concepts of print involves understanding how books and print function and their conventions (e.g. how books are organised and handled; print directionality); and the ability to distinguish print from images and understanding that both can (co)construct meaning.

Table 5 corresponds to Section 4.3 of the Literature Review.

Table 5. Concepts of print: Learning objectives for children and corresponding strategies for library staff

CONCEPTS OF PRINT	Birth to 12 months	12 – 24 months	2 – 3 years	3 – 5 years
Literacy learning objectives for children	For children to: Physically touch, explore and manipulate a range of board books. Watch other children and adults handling books.	For children to: Recognise that print and pictures are visually distinct on the page. Develop book handling skills (e.g. turning pages).	For children to: Begin to understand that print conveys meaning. Further develop concepts such as orientation and directionality.	For children to: Develop concepts of authorship, illustration, and book layout. Verbalise responses to characters and other textual elements.
Educator strategies to support children's learning	Have attractive books readily available for babies to touch and handle. Talk to caregivers about the value of sharing books with babies.	Model book handling skills. Use language for talking about language, books, print and literacy (e.g. 'page', 'book', 'pictures' and 'words').	Point out environmental print in library (e.g. 'Exit', 'Loan Returns' signs) and explain its meaning. Read books in which print is visually distinct from picture and draw children's attention to print.	Allow wait time for children to respond. Share your own responses to book with children.
Notes specific to my community:				

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4.4. Oral language and vocabulary

Oral language and vocabulary includes knowledge of words and ability to use them and other features of oral language to communicate effectively in different situations.

Table 6 corresponds to Section 4.3, Section 5.1 and Table 2 of the Literature Review.

Table 6. Oral language and vocabulary: Learning objectives for children and corresponding strategies for library staff

ORAL LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY	Birth to 12 months	12 – 24 months	2 – 3 years	3 – 5 years
Literacy learning objectives for children	For children to: Engage in one-to-one interactions with caregivers. Participate in turn-taking games with caregiver.	For children to: Recognise that pictures in books relate to real world objects and events. Enact actions depicted in books (e.g. touch your toes; turn around).	For children to: Enjoy simple narratives about familiar experiences e.g. meals, playing, losing a favourite toy. Hear new words used in context.	For children to: Encounter unusual words in books. Gain experience with the language features of different genres.
Educator strategies to support children's learning	Explain to caregivers the importance of talking to babies. Model ways of talking to babies.	Read simple books which represent familiar objects and events. Allow plenty of time for children to make connections between the pictures and words.	Read both narrative and concept books, with different artistic styles and content areas. Explain new concepts necessary to comprehend meaning in book.	Read both narrative and information books. Explain unusual words before reading to enhance comprehension. Talk about words and concepts after reading and re-read book at least once.
Notes specific to my community:				

4.5. Background knowledge

Background knowledge refers to knowledge of the physical, biological and social world and human experience in it.

Table 7 presented below corresponds to Section 4.3 of the Literature Review.

Table 7. Background knowledge: Learning objectives for children and corresponding strategies for library staff

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE	Birth to 12 months	12 – 24 months	2 – 3 years	3 – 5 years
Literacy learning objectives for children	For children to: Touch or handle a variety of picture books. Look at pictures of familiar scenes from their local community.	For children to: Recognise their own lives in the picture books they see. Listen to songs and rhymes in home language(s) and English.	For children to: Make links between their experiences and the experiences described and depicted in picture books. Point out and name things they know about in the pictures.	For children to: Discover new information about topics of interest e.g. dinosaurs. Enjoy more complex and diverse narrative texts.
Educator strategies to support children's learning	Encourage caregivers to interact with babies in their home language(s) (e.g. nursery rhymes, lullabies). Explain to caregivers the importance of talking to babies.	Provide books about topics and experiences familiar to all toddlers (e.g. babies, animals). Provide multilingual and multicultural books and other materials.	Choose books where pictures give clues to meanings of words, especially for children from diverse backgrounds. Make connections between pictured objects and children's lives (e.g. Do you have a pet? Have you seen a fire engine?)	Talk about book content before reading. Ask children questions about their experiences in relation to the picture book.
Notes specific to my community:				

4.6. Print motivation

Print motivation refers to the willingness to engage in literacy practices that involve print such as reading and writing.

Table 8 presented below corresponds to Section 4.3 of the Literature Review.

Table 8. Print motivation: Learning objectives for children and corresponding strategies for library staff

PRINT MOTIVATION	Birth to 12 months	12 – 24 months	2 – 3 years	3 – 5 years
Literacy learning objectives for children	For children to: Enjoy looking at pictures and vocalising. Engage with caregivers by moving to the rhythm of songs and rhymes.	For children to: Enjoy watching other children and being part of the group. Physically respond to patterned language (e.g. finger rhymes).	For children to: Be able to identify with characters in books who are like themselves. Choose a book to borrow and take home.	For children to: Have the opportunity to talk about their responses to books. Choose a book in an area of interest to borrow and take home.
Educator strategies to support children's learning	Demonstrate enthusiasm through voice and body language. Choose books which are relevant to children's and their families' culture and language.	Demonstrate your enthusiasm for books and reading. Choose books that invite children to respond physically (e.g. clapping, stamping, wriggling).	Choose books which are free from gender bias and cultural bias. Choose books where pictures give clues to meanings of words, especially for children from diverse backgrounds.	Talk about your own responses to books and make your thinking "visible" (e.g. 'poor bear'). Make the books you read available to children for exploration after the session.
Notes specific to my community:				

5. Planning effective early literacy sessions

This section aims to assist library staff in planning effective storytime sessions. It presents a template, to be completed when planning a storytime session (see Table 9), together with these supporting notes. When planning your storytime, remember to always keep the big picture goals in mind: sharing the enjoyment of books and reading with the children, exposing them to a wide variety of high quality books, and sharing ways to support children's early literacy with adults. These are the overarching goals of all storytime programs. In addition, during storytime, presenters model the behaviours that may directly promote the language and literacy development of young children.

To support library staff engaged in designing and delivering early literacy sessions, in Section 5.1 we introduce the Session Planning Template and in Section 5.2 offer some Frequently Asked Questions and Answers, which include suggestions from experienced storytime presenters.

5.1. Early Literacy Session Planning Template

The template presented in this section has been designed to encourage presenters to plan each storytime by thinking about their objectives for children's language and literacy learning in each session and about the strategies they as educators can use to achieve them. The template asks one to specify the target age of the children, the date and time of the session as well as, optionally, the theme. It then asks presenters to identify the Early Language and Literacy Domain/s they will focus on, for example, phonological awareness (on language and literacy domains, see further Section 2.2. in this Framework and the Literature Review). Presenters also need to articulate their objectives for children's learning, the strategies they plan to use to achieve them and the literacy tip(s) for parents/caregivers they plan to share in the session. The rationale for including parent tips is to help caregivers understand the connection between the activities being presented and the early literacy development of their child. The information shared with caregivers does not need to be long (e.g. "Children need lots of repetition to learn, so it is important to continue singing songs and reciting nursery rhymes with your child as often as you can.").

The Session Planning Template next requires the identification of books, props, technology and craft materials that will be used in the storytime alongside some consideration of the space. As well as laying out the storytime rug, for instance, you may need to think about where you will position yourself in the space (e.g. Will the presenter or the children and their caregivers face the large window wall? Will you position yourself in a corner and have the children face away from distraction at the circulation desk or library entrance?). Also consider how you will position yourself in relation to the group (e.g. Will you stand at the front, sit at the front or sit on the rug and invite the children to join you?). Your position in the space may also change as the storytime activities change.

The middle section of the template requires careful consideration of the actual structure of the session. The storytime sessions we observed, recorded and analysed for this project included the following types of activities with transitions woven in between them:

- **Opening greeting and warm-up song**
- **Introduction to the storytime theme** (if applicable)
- **Shared Book Reading**
    - o Presenter reading to group
    - o *Child and caregiver reading together independently

- **Singing and reciting nursery rhymes**
- ***Oral story telling**
- ***Drama and literacy-oriented play activities**
- **Dance and Movement** (including playing musical instruments)
- **Craft activity** (in sessions for children aged 3-5 years)
- **Closure and Goodbye song**

This list of activities conveys loosely the order in which the activities tended to occur in the sessions that we filmed. An asterisk marks those activities that were less common. Craft activities were very common in sessions for children aged 3-5 years, but typically absent in sessions for younger children.

While reading books and nursery rhymes are core activities in library storytime, there was considerable variation among the sessions we observed and analysed: in the number and types of songs, nursery rhymes and books included in each session; whether the reading of each book was followed by one or more songs/nursery rhymes; whether the session included dancing, oral story-telling, craft, or a segment where caregivers read with their children; whether the session had a theme; and where the craft activity (a staple of all sessions for preschool-aged children and very uncommon in sessions for younger children) was positioned – in the middle of the session or immediately before or after the Closure and Goodbye Song segment. So, library staff then have considerable freedom in which activities to include in addition to reading, singing and reciting nursery rhymes in early literacy sessions, and how to sequence them. Yet, to offer all children, especially regular attendees, a strong sense of security and continuity, it is important that you adopt a consistent structure from one storytime session to another.

The next section of the template asks you to consider contingency options for a mixed audience (see Section 2.1 above on differentiation). If siblings of different ages attend together, the session needs to cater to very different levels of knowledge and skills while enabling families to share in an enjoyable experience around language, books and reading. Children who are new to storytime or are learning English as an additional language would also benefit from carefully designed activities that support their understanding of the new context or language. The challenge for the presenters, then, is how to engage children at different stages of language and literacy development. To address it, you need variety in the length of books, types of songs and types of activities you select. You may also select books in which shortening or skipping some passages would still allow the audience to follow the meaning of the book. On the other hand, one of the advantages of mixed-age storytime is that older children can be role models showing younger children how to participate in storytime. Importantly, remember to always give positive feedback when children understand what you are saying and follow your directions.

The second part of the Session Planning Template is retrospective in focus. It encourages both reflection and evaluation. In particular, once a session is over, evaluate which activities, strategies, resources and other aspects of the session worked well and which did not, consider why this was the case, and discuss any challenges with your peers. Identify and record suggestions for things you can improve on next time, and consider the implications of your experience for future planning.

Table 9. Early Literacy Session Planning Template

Target age group:		Date:		Time:
Theme:				
Literacy Domain/s:	**Objectives for children's learning:**	**Strategies to support children's learning:**		**Literacy tips for parents/caregivers:**
Books, Props, Resources & Equipment:		**Spatial organisation:**		

Session Development:

How will you greet each child/caregiver at the start of the session to establish connection and welcome them?

What songs, finger plays, or rhymes will you use to warm up the group? How will you display the words of the songs?

How will you use to introduce the theme of the week?

How will you signal transitions between different activities in the session?

How will you prepare the children to understand the content/topic of each book? Are there any difficult words you need to explain? How will you explain their meaning?

What can they do while you are reading each book? Will you provide an independent reading opportunity for children and their caregivers? Will you include explicitly tips on how caregivers can select suitable books for young children of different ages, or will you use a basket with suitable books that they can choose from and read during and/or borrow after the session?

What other activities will you include – dance, musical instruments, oral storytelling, craft?

What craft activity would best suit the theme, or will you link the craft (e.g. drawing) to a book or cultural event (e.g. Chinese New Year, Anzac Day, Book week)? How will you demonstrate the craft activity?

How will you close the session? Remember to give adult caregivers a closing tip for reinforcing the literacy skill at home and to encourage borrowing.

Consider how much time each activity will take.

Support ideas for younger children:	Extension ideas for older children:

Evaluation of the session

Implications for Future Planning

5.2.   Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The frequently asked questions presented in this section have arisen from our observations and detailed multimodal analyses of a wide range of storytimes in NSW public libraries and extended interviews with the presenters of these sessions. The answers we offer to these questions, whenever possible, incorporate examples from notable storytime practices we have observed. We also acknowledge the unique challenges of the library context; for example, how important it is to build consistency and continuity into storytime even though some children may only attend once or on an infrequent basis.

How can we best organise the children's storytime space?

If you are using a special story time rug and the number of children is not too large, you can ask the children to sit on the rug together with you as equal members of one group and one community. The advantages of sitting together in this way are that you are all at eye level, so it is easy to smile and interact with them one on one. This closeness, moreover, facilitates direct eye contact with both the children and their caregivers.

If the group is large, you can sit on a chair at the front of the group, so you are easier to see. Being higher than the children also clearly signals to the group that you are the educator or leader, so they need to listen to and follow your instructions/guidance.

If you stand at the front of the group, the children need to look up at you and you tower over them making the connection somewhat more distant. However, this position is very useful for acting out 'words' or demonstrating actions as everybody in the group can see you.

You may also need to give some thought to how you will arrange seating for the parents and caregivers. Many young children like to sit on the lap of their parent or caregiver, especially if they are new to the library and feel insecure. As they gain confidence, though, children do tend to migrate from the lap to the rug. So, you may wish to keep adult chairs in reasonably close proximity to the rug. Keeping adults close to the rug has another potential benefit, as it brings adults closer to the 'action' and makes it harder for them to talk and distract the group.

Another vital consideration is whether or not the children can see the book you will be reading and the illustrations. Managing this may require some careful thought especially if the book you have chosen is small. Is it possible to use a big book? If not, how will you try to ensure that all the children can see the book and the illustrations?

Related to this, when you read a book aloud, how will you manage the logistics of reading to a group? What side will you hold the book on – the right or the left? Which side is most comfortable for you?

You also need to give some thought to the songs and lyrics you plan to use. How will you display the words of each song for the group? Will you use a whiteboard and display all the songs on it at once? Or will you display the words on nearby shelving? If so, how will the group know which words will be sung before the song begins? Will you say the name of the song aloud and point to the text on the board at the same time so that you promote print awareness? Will you bind the lyrics into a flip chart? The drawback of this is that it fixes the order of the songs, yet an advantage is the group would focus on only one text/song/rhyme at a time.

How can we create a thriving library community of learners?

We know that language interactions with others are crucial for literacy and learning as well as community formation. So, arrive early before each session in order to set up and also use the opportunity to create a welcoming atmosphere by greeting children and their caregivers as they arrive. Be sure to smile warmly as you say hello. Try to make eye contact with each child as this invites children to make a social connection with you. If there are children who attend regularly, try to learn their names. To engage individual children, as well as to promote print awareness and alphabet and letter knowledge, some presenters write each child's name on a nametag sticker, and others ask caregivers or any children who can write their own names to do that, so that the children can wear the nametag and the presenter can see and use children's names during the session.

In addition, make time to chat with children individually. You can sit with them on the rug **before** storytime and talk to them about the weather, their pets, their clothing or use puppets or a picture book to begin a conversation with them. You may also offer them playtime before the session to encourage interaction with other children and adults by providing them with soft toys (beach balls), puppets or musical instruments to play with. Providing opportunities for play before storytime may allow adults and children some time to transition from the outside world they have just left behind to the world of books and the library.

At the end of storytime, try to engage the children in conversation again if possible. One storytime presenter designs each craft activity in such a way that the child must come to them for a staple, rubber band or sticker that completes the craft object. This reinforces the social connection with the child and provides the presenter with the opportunity for a brief one-to-one interaction with each child. Such interactions may enable the presenter to ask questions about each child's interests and make individualised borrowing suggestions for children's books or other relevant library resources. Borrowing helps to foster the habit of coming to the library and keeps the connection between the library and the child alive. Other presenters ask the children to show their craft object to a library staff member at the front desk. This also opens up the potential for interaction, social connection and community formation with a simple question like 'Tell me about your drawing/puppet/craft'.

How can we create an engaging opening and closing to the session?

To establish a safe learning environment for regular attendees, include some repetition within and across your storytime sessions. One easy way to do this is to use predictable routine elements such as the same Welcome and Goodbye song each week. Such repetition not only enables children to learn the songs, it actually helps them participate more easily.

As you sing the Welcome song, greet each child with a smile again, make eye contact and wave hello. This is an important opportunity to connect with each child as you formally welcome them to their local library community. Such greetings offer a powerful opportunity for social interaction between the library staff and storytime participants and among the participants. In fact, greetings not only initiate social connection and strong engagement, they also function to personalise the library experience. Smiling and waving goodbye at the end as you sing the Goodbye song also gives the session a warm sense of closure. Goodbye songs can include, 'This is the Way We Say Goodbye'.

Attending a library storytime session also teaches children how to behave in a group setting. So, at the start of each session, supportively articulate your expectations about both adult

participation and child behaviour. For example, 'We encourage everyone to listen carefully to our stories today, join in with the songs and rhymes, and have fun together'. You may also wish to let the attending adults know that seeing *caregivers* participate enthusiastically (e.g. listening carefully, singing songs and joining in the activities) will encourage children to adopt the same behaviours themselves and join in too. It is useful to give parents and caregivers permission to leave at any point if their child is not feeling happy, and return when the child is feeling more settled.

Many presenters report problems with attending adults who continue to chat to the person sitting next to them – a behaviour that can be very distracting and unsettling for the entire group. Some presenters arrange for their peers to help out by standing behind 'the talkers' and singing more loudly. Others are not able to do this as staffing ratios are not high enough. If adults keep talking during storytime, you may want to remind them that children tend to watch 'grown ups' closely and imitate our behaviours. Encourage adults to join in the activities and save their conversations until storytime has finished, so that everyone can have fun and help the children learn.

What are some ideas for warming up the group?

To warm children up and continue fostering a sense of community, introduce a couple of songs and rhymes with finger play. These not only expose children to the rhythms and sounds of the English language, they also help to synchronise the group into one community, much like a Mexican wave. Do not be afraid to sing each song or rhyme twice as such repetition helps children learn. You can also clap or tap to syllables in words while saying or singing them, and use finger play activities that engage children in moving their fingers.

With pre-school children, you could consider songs like 'Willoughby Wallaby Woo' to focus on rhyme and learn each child's name. A soft toy elephant or puppet could make this song even more enjoyable.

With younger children, a popular song is 'What do you think my name is?'. If the group is small, you could consider incorporating the rolling of a large beach ball into the song or the clapping of hands.

Before you start, to help coordinate the group, you could count to three. For example, 'Let's sing Open – Shut them. Are you ready? One, two, three.' When you finish each song, clap and praise the children for participating, 'Give yourselves a big clap! Yay!'. This can also function as a transition marker.

How can we signal transitions more effectively?

As you transition one from part of storytime to another, build in 'signals' to help the participants. Signals could include songs, musical signposts, a puppet or something as simple as clapping at the end of a song or a signposting statement such as 'It's time for a story now', 'Let's sing our hello song' or 'This is the last song for today'. These transitions are vital to the audience as they let them know what is coming next and orient them to how much longer the session will last.

What strategies can we use to introduce the theme of the session?

If you are using a theme, talk about it with the children first and try to make connections to their own experiences. For example, 'Today we are going to read some books about friendship. A friend is somebody who cares about us, and who likes to spend time playing

with us. Can everybody who has a friend put a hand up in the air? What kinds of things do you like to do with your friends?'.

Alternately, you could use a puppet hidden in a box to introduce the theme and stimulate curiosity. A session about mice started with the following introduction: 'Today's books are all about a very small animal. It has two ears, a long tail and whiskers. Can anyone guess what it is? That's right, a mouse.' The presenters then incorporated a factual book on mice and used selected pages from the book to talk about the different body parts of a mouse and its appearance (e.g. whiskers, the number of legs, tail and so on).

Another option is to bring in a prop to stimulate children's interest in the theme. In a session about pirates, the presenter introduced the theme, and related vocabulary, through a puppet: 'This is Pete the Pirate. Pete, can you teach us how to say some pirate words?'. Pete then taught the children various expressions such as 'Aye' and 'Ahoy me hearties'. The information book *100 Things You Should Know about Pirates* by Andrew Langley was also used to teach vocabulary associated with aspects of life on the seas (e.g. 'hammock', 'tall ships', 'mast', 'sails').

Before the session, you may need to research the theme in order to be able to introduce it well to the children. For example, if the theme is insects and you plan to read *The Hungry Caterpillar*, you may wish to read about the process of metamorphosis before the session, so that you can easily recall, and teach preschool-aged children, the names and functions of the different stages in the life cycle of butterflies – for example, immature stage (caterpillar) to an adult stage (butterfly); the function of the cocoon (to protect from predators); behavioural differences (most caterpillars feed on plants and butterflies on nectar from flowers). Include any interesting questions and facts you think relevant (e.g. Are caterpillars insects?) to promote the development of background knowledge.

What are some effective strategies for shared book reading?

Thought needs to be given to how many books will be read and how, to the quantity and the quality of the selected books and the way they are read. Do the children need exposure to 4 or 5 books on the theme or would 2, carefully read, be more effective for engaging a young audience? Is there anything about the actual language and images in the book that would make this an ideal choice for an engaging storytime? For example, books structured around questions (e.g. *Would You Rather...* by John Burningham; *Whose Bottom?* by Jeannette Rowe) promote interaction because questions, by their very nature, expect a response from the reader/listener. This helps to make the reading experience more interactive.

After selections have been made, it is important to practise reading each book out loud from cover to cover. During the practice, think about how you will use intonation and sounds to convey meaning, voice inflection for different characters, point to key images on the page, and use illustrations to best prepare children for the next page and the unfolding sequence of events.

While you are reading aloud, also think about how you will keep the attention of the group and encourage their participation. You really need to know the contents of each book very well (its language/words as well as images and overall structure) if you are going to ask effective questions of the children.

Finally, plan for contingencies: think about how you can shorten a book if the group is noisy and a story has not engaged them. You may also wish to consider having a selection of theme

related books on display during storytime, so that caregivers who would like to can borrow them to read at home with the child.

How can we introduce a book?

First, show it to the children. Tell them the title, the names of the author and illustrator in a way that is appropriate to the target age group. You may introduce 4-5-year-olds to words such as 'author', 'illustrator' and 'title', while for younger children a simpler introduction to these concepts of print may be more suitable (e.g. 'This book is called *Monkey Puzzle*. The words are written by Julia Donaldson, and the pictures are by Axel Scheffler.'). To foster print motivation, too, help children understand that somebody writes the words and somebody draws the pictures, and in this way people create the picture books children love to listen to and look at. You can also ask them to look closely at the book's front cover (and sometimes even back cover) and try to guess what the book will be about. This will encourage them to draw on their background knowledge to engage in prediction, an important reading comprehension strategy.

Before you begin reading, it is very helpful for comprehension to clearly explain any unfamiliar words or ideas e.g. camouflage. Think about how will you convey their meaning e.g. can you act them out? Explaining unfamiliar words in this way should help prepare each child to understand the story that is about to unfold. During and after the reading, keep drawing attention to the unfamiliar words/phrases and repeat them because repetition is crucial for learning vocabulary.

When preparing a session, thought also needs to be given to what the children can do while you read the text. In other words, how can they interact with the story? For example, are there animal noises they can make, can they clap when they hear a particular word, shout out answers to your questions or press a button (it can be an imaginary button on the palm of their hands)? Such choices for interaction keep children engaged and help them develop their listening skills.

How can we talk about the book afterwards?

After the reading, review what you have read with children and expand on new words, concepts or ideas. With pre-school children, from time to time, explain the differences between similar words: e.g. In *Llama Llama Red Pajam*a by Anna Dewdney, the author uses the words 'whimper, weep and wail'. Ask what is similar about these words and what is different? You could demonstrate the differences in meaning and then ask *the children* to act out each word.

You may like to read a book like, *What Will Fat Cat Sit On*? by Jan Thomas. During the reading, the children can make the animal sounds or repeat the refrain 'What will fat cat sit on?' After the reading is complete, you could retell the story with the group using animal puppets (a cat, a cow, a chicken, a pig, a dog) and a chair.

To promote comprehension, especially in storytimes for 3-5-year-olds, try to ask at least one open-ended question that encourages children to infer information that is not explicitly stated in the book, for example, to draw conclusions about a character's emotions or motives. As this may be too difficult with large and/or mixed-age groups, you may ask this question right at the end (and in this way provide caregivers with a model for the kinds of higher-order questions they can ask children when reading together at home) and present it as one for children to think and talk about with their caregivers later. Using Yes/No or polar questions instead may move the group along more easily. You can also use specify questions (who,

what, when, where) to check comprehension of the key elements of the story that has been read.

For younger children

With younger children, read predictable books and books with repeated word patterns. If the book is about an animal such as a lion or tiger, you can also ask them to provide the animal sounds before, during and after the reading. An excellent book for young children is the factual text *Whose Feet?* by Jeanette Rowe. It is a lift-the-flap book that encourages interaction because it is structured as a series of questions (that demand answers). In addition, the use of flaps encourages children's prediction skills. These are tested when the storytime presenter lifts the flap stimulating both curiosity and engagement. At the same time, lift-the-flap books may attract the attention of children who want to come and touch or even take the books away from the presenter, so you need to consider how you will use them to discourage such behaviour.

How can caregivers become more involved in shared book reading?

With all age groups, you can place a basket of books that you have selected on the floor and invite each child to choose a book for their caregiver to read to them. E.g. 'Now it's time for your own reading. Choose a book you like and read it with your parent or caring adult'. This is an important choice as it encourages independent reading. Independent engagement with books in this way seems to be crucial for libraries especially if it can be later extended to the borrowing of other books. You could also consider including wordless picture books so the adult and child could jointly construct a story together.

How can we incorporate some oral storytelling into the session?

Another option you may wish to consider is the inclusion of oral storytelling. Oral storytelling involves both a story and its telling (or performance). A key advantage is that it removes the logistical challenges of shared book reading (e.g. the audience not being able to see the book being read). In addition, oral storytelling brings characters to life, so the children can see how they move, look and even sound. You may choose to tell a well-known story such as Red Riding Hood or Goldilocks by acting it out.

If you find this idea challenging, think about using a puppet to tell the story. When the puppet 'speaks', remember to fix your gaze on it, so that the audience also looks at the puppet (rather than your face, which is really narrating the story). Although you, the storyteller, are always visible to the audience, it is the puppet and not you who should not be the focal point of their attention.

Some storytime presenters have developed signature stories with predictable and repeated action sequences that they share with the group each week. These stories may integrate familiar songs (e.g. Twinkle, Twinkle; Baa Baa Black Sheep and Old MacDonald) or repetitive refrains, allowing the children and their caregivers to join in. Stories like these expose children to a sequence of unfolding actions, help to develop their listening skills and support their physical development with movement activities while also nurturing their phonological awareness.

How can we incorporate movement into storytime?

After children have listened to one (or more) books, it is a good idea to change activities as they may be getting restless. It may be possible, for example, to incorporate focused movement activities such as putting actions to a story or acting out parts of a story. Activities such as these give children a break from sitting and can be used to enhance comprehension. For example, you could ask children to act out the steps of growing from a caterpillar to a cocoon to a butterfly. This has the potential to improve their understanding of the process of metamorphosis through movement.

Other ways of supporting their physical development include incorporating movement experiences such as bouncing, clapping, swaying, swinging, galloping, marching and dancing according to the age of the children. A popular movement activity, especially if the theme involves animals, is imitating animal movements.

Other movement activities involve using scarves, rhythm sticks, shakers, musical instruments or ribbons. If you are using shakers or musical instruments, before the song, allow children to experiment with the sounds they make (soft, loud, slow, fast) and their placement (high, low, front, back, side, left, and right).

Handing out musical instruments, and collecting them at the end of the activity, offers an important opportunity to connect with each child by name, look them in the eye and smile as you thank them for returning the object. We observed this in a large Baby Rhyme Time lesson attended by 40 children, from infants to preschool age. As already mentioned, such interpersonal connection is vital to building a strong library community. After the collection of objects, you will likely need to realign the group into a cohesive whole again. To do this, songs such as 'Row, Row, Row your boat' which incorporate actions and singing can be useful. Other choices could be gentle songs like 'Twinkle Twinkle,' which tend to have a calming effect on a group and bring the participants together as one again.

How can we get the most out of craft activities?

Craft activities are well appreciated as a valuable opportunity for children to develop fine-motor skills important for learning to write as well as school readiness in general. They also connect children and caregivers during and after storytime sessions. After a session, for example, the object created during craft and taken home could prompt a child to tell family members and friends who did not attend storytime about that experience. This helps the child develop important literacy-related oral language skills and establishes a stronger connection between families, storytime and the library. Craft offers an opportunity to incorporate mark-making and writing into children's storytime (e.g. children writing their names), too.

To encourage children to complete the craft activity, it is important to keep craft simple and engaging, ideally open-ended, and to give children and caregivers very brief and clear instructions. When introducing the craft activity, clear instructions that focus on the most important aspects/steps in the activity and presented in a child-friendly language are not only likely to increase children's confidence in completing the activity independently, but also expose children to an important type of language – giving instructions (this is of course as much about literacy as it is about school readiness).

To encourage interaction between children and their caregivers, the activity should be as open-ended as possible. In one multi-age storytime that included the picture book *What's in*

My Lunchbox (written by Peter Carnavas and illustrated by Kat Chadwick), children were given an A3 sheet with the outline of an open lunchbox drawn on it, glue, scissors and discontinued magazines and asked to work with their parents/caregivers to find/select and cut out anything they would like to take to school in their lunchbox. This generated a lot of talk between the children and their caregivers about what a child likes/doesn't like to eat, healthy vs. unhealthy food, why they would like to take a toy car in their lunchbox/to school, etc.

As suggested above, craft activities can also be designed to support the growth of oral language skills that are essential for later literacy and academic achievement. These include having a rich vocabulary, which allows a child to be precise in referring to various objects and aspects of their experiences (in some cases using abstract words such as 'animals' or 'love'). A rich vocabulary combined with other language resources (e.g. grammatical resources such as past or future tense, number, etc.) also allow children to interact effectively with different people in different contexts (e.g. with close family members and friends but later also teachers at school, participate in one-to-one or one-to-many interactions), especially to share information that others don't already know and is not easily available in the immediate physical context (e.g. tell a parent what happened at preschool or at library storytime that day when the parent was at work).

When writing, unlike in face-to-face interactions, we cannot point to objects in the immediate physical context, or rely on gestures and facial expressions, and so we need to be clear about what reference words such as 'here', 'there', 'it', 'she', 'he', etc. mean. To become effective writers, children also need to learn to think about and anticipate what their readers know or don't know and what their reaction to something would be.

Craft activities can also be designed to incorporate actual mark-making and writing into storytime. For instance, for 'Library lovers day', children and caregivers can be encouraged to complete the sentence "I love storytime because…." written on a piece of paper inside a heart-shaped frame. A similar prompt could be used on Valentine's Day, Mother's Day or Father's Day. You could also formulate some simple dialogic questions that prompt children to think of their own story, which they tell their caregiver during craft time, who writes it down and reads it back to them. Some children are fascinated that words *from their mouths* can be recorded on paper and read aloud.

How can we manage our props during a storytime session?

First of all, what props will you use during the session (e.g. a doll, a stuffed owl, a beach ball or a puppet)?

- What will be the function of your prop(s)? Will it be your 'baby' so you can use it to model actions that caregivers can perform with their babies during the session? What will you do the rest of the time with it? Where will you put it when it's not in use?

- Will you introduce it as a surprise at a special moment in the session? Will you, for example, hide an object in a basket and use it to introduce the theme by describing the object and asking them to guess what it is?

- Or will it become a mascot for the group, that is, a regular 'guest' that makes an appearance each week and that the children connect with routinely? If so, when is the best time to introduce the mascot? Will the children be allowed to touch it? Or will it just appear each week and wave hello (and goodbye) to the group? Be sure to model

how you wish children to interact with it and move it away if any child is afraid of it. You may house the mascot in a box and sing a special song with the group (e.g. 'Twinkle, Twinkle') to wake it up each week, and then put it back to sleep at the end of storytime.

Will you include musical instruments in the session?

- What rules will you introduce for instruments when you bring them out?

- How will you integrate them? Shake them to the beat of a song? Integrate them into a dance? Use them to develop comprehension (e.g. during the reading of a picture book about fire fighters, instruct the children, 'Shake the instrument when you hear me say 'siren'')?

- Will you get children to practise making music/the action(s) before the song begins (so they have some idea of what to expect and are listening for it)?

- How will you get children's attention back once the instrument activity is completed?

Will you use a music player?

If so,

- check that it is working

- make sure it is next to you (so you can turn it on/off easily)

- make sure it is loud enough for everybody in the room to hear

- make sure you have the CD or audio file/s you plan to play with you, and, if possible, set the music player so that it is ready to go.

How should you organise your props?

- Before the session begins, order your props: put the first object you will be using on top, then the next one and so forth.

- Make sure they are all where they need to be for the session to run smoothly and then go and greet the children and their caregivers.

How can we encourage participation for everyone in the library group situation?

One issue which concerns some storytime presenters is how best to manage the behaviour of the children and their caregivers. Children are most likely to be engaged when they can hear, see, have time to comprehend what is being presented, and are interested in the content, and when they have positive role models to follow, that is, when their caregivers are engaged as well. It is important to maintain the attention of the group to achieve your storytime objectives.

Explain your expectations at the beginning of each session. After the greeting, briefly explain what will happen in the session (e.g. 'We will sing some songs first and then listen to a story about ...'). State clearly your expectations of the group. You could hold up a sign with words and pictures presenting the "rules". For example, for preschool-aged children, these rules may include: (1) Put on our "listening ears"; (2) Join in the songs; (3) Raise your hand up if you want to say something.

Emphasise that it is very important for caregivers to pay attention and join in the singing and nursery rhymes, too. In this way, the adults would provide children with a good model of how to participate in storytime and help them benefit from storytime.

You can decide what you want the "rules" to be for your sessions. Then keep reminding children and their caregivers whenever necessary.

Ensure that everyone can see and hear you. Children quickly become distracted when they cannot see or hear the presenter clearly. They begin to talk and move about, which creates more disruption to the group as a whole. Be sure to use a strong, clear voice and project it to the group as a whole. If you have to turn away briefly, stop talking until you are facing the children again, and resume speaking loudly so that everyone can hear you without having to strain.

Pace your presentation. Young children need time to process what you are saying, so speak slowly, articulate clearly and emphasise key words by varying your pitch, intonation and body language. Monitor the group visually and make sure that you take the children with you as you move through your program. Repeat a song or rhyme a couple of times if necessary, so that children have "thinking" time to work out how to respond.

Choice of book. The choice of book plays a key role in managing the behaviour of children. The aim is to choose books which will engage all children by addressing themes which matter to them and which treat them with respect (e.g. families, friends, animals, helping etc). Avoid books which focus on special interest topics. For example, books about diggers and dump trucks will fascinate some children but are unlikely to appeal to a wider audience. Books about dinosaurs may frighten younger ones. The language in books is also important. Rhyming books and repetitive texts allow all children to participate and become "tellers" as well as "listeners".

Questioning. Questioning is an important way to encourage children's participation, but it needs to be managed carefully so that a small number of talkative children don't dominate. In the library context, it is best to ask mainly yes-no and 'raise your hand if…' questions related to the text (e.g. 'Who has a pet?'; 'Who came to the library on the bus?') or specific/single answer questions (e.g. 'Who knows what this animal is called?'). If you ask questions which require an explanation, be aware that some children will give factually incorrect responses, or begin to talk about an unrelated topic, so think about how you will handle this situation tactfully. If the response is not correct, it is important to give feedback (e.g. 'Good try, but I think he might be looking for his mummy.') or if a child begins to recount a personal experience, you might say 'Can you tell me more about that later?', rather than allow one child to dominate the session.

Craft instructions. If the session incorporates a craft activity, present the instructions for the activity very clearly at the start. Ask caregivers to avoid completing the activity *for* their children and complete it *with* their children. Explain that the best way adults can support children's language and literacy during craft activities is to supervise and (i) let children themselves complete the hands-on parts of the experience (e.g. the cutting, gluing, colouring-in, threading), which help children develop the fine motor skills involved in learning how to (hand)write, and (ii) engage children in talking about the activity – the steps it involves, the materials they are using, the creative decisions they are making, how the craft they are making relates to books they have read, and so on.

Refocus. If you find the group is becoming disconnected and distracted, it is important to refocus the group before you attempt to continue with a story. Perhaps ask children to stand up, shake their hands, have a wriggle, or some other strategy to regain their attention. Some find songs like 'Twinkle, Twinkle' to be very soothing and to settle the group effectively. Another song that seems to work well in refocusing storytime groups especially after a noisy interlude with musical instruments is 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat'.

Finally, remember to enjoy yourself!

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