

CHILDREN and LIBRARIES
An Investment in Our Future

Chapbook...

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North Carolina Library Association**

Message From the Chair: On Our Way With Summer Reading!

For most people, the word summer conjures up visions of white beaches. However for most public library children's staff, summer brings up the image of a frenzy of out-of-school children checking out books, joining reading clubs, and attending library programs. It is a lot of fun and a lot of work. Of course, for many library employees, the jumpstart to summer planning is the Summer Reading Program Workshop put on by the State Library. It is wonderful that the State Library gives us a solid foundation to start planning our summer activities.

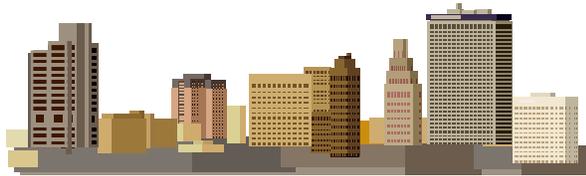
As someone who has served twice on the State Library Summer Reading Program Committee, I have always been struck by how much effort it takes to create the manual, artwork and materials for North Carolina's public libraries. Putting together the Summer Reading Program manual is a time consuming business. Volunteers frequently have to be scrounged up by the Youth Services Consultant since not many libraries can afford to have staff away at meetings. The quality of the manual and artwork sometimes exceeds expectations but sometimes falls below expectations due to factors beyond the committee's control (i.e. copyright permissions, selection of artwork submitted for consideration etc.).

Jim Rosinia, current Youth Services Consultant for the State Library, decided to research how other states create quality Summer Reading Programs and discovered the Collaborative Summer Library Program. CSLP is a consortium of agencies and associations from 25 states. The Collaborative hires a talented artist, creates the activities manual and works with a vendor to supply materials and incentives. What is there not to like? After a lot of discussion, the State Library decided to join CSLP. Now about all that is left for Jim's Summer Reading Program team to do is put on the annual workshops. What a relief!

There are lots of advantages to this new way of doing things. I, for one, look forward to many years of working with the Collaborative Summer Library Program and I applaud Jim and the NC State Library administration for making this bold move. It wouldn't surprise me if the rest of our states' libraries join us within the next decade.

Have a great summer!

**Carol Laing McNeil, Youth Services Manager
East Regional Library of Wake County Public Library System**



From the State Library.....

By Jim Rosinia

State Library Youth Consultant

This may seem like I'm preaching to the choir, but bear with me. . . .

When it comes to literacy development – the sooner, the better. The sooner children are introduced to language and books, the better. The age at which a child is first read to is associated with the child's interest in and enjoyment of reading activities. One study found a significant correlation between the reported age of the beginning of shared reading and language scores at four years of age [Adam Payne, Grover Whitehurst, and Andrea Angell, “The Role of Home Literacy Environment in the Development of Language Ability in Preschool Children for Low-Income Families”, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, v. 9 issues 3-4 (1994) p.422-440.] In turn, a child's interest in reading activities is an important predictor of his or her later reading achievement.

Over the past ten years, research using MRI and PET scans – non-invasive tools that let us observe the brain while children are awake and functioning – has greatly enhanced our knowledge of how the brain works and how it develops. So now we're beginning to learn why early exposure to language – spoken and written language – makes a difference.

Okay. It's time for “Neurology 101.” (If you'd rather cut class, just skim down until you see that school is out.)

For anything to happen – for you to sense that a stove is hot, for your muscles to contract and pull away from the stove, for your brain to file away the oh-so-useful information that hot stoves shouldn't be touched – electrical signals are transmitted from one nerve cell, or neuron, to another. In the brain (as elsewhere in the Central Nervous System), part of one neuron gets close to part of another neuron at a junction called a synapse. For electrical signals to get from one neuron to another, synaptic connections are essential.

The brain is the least developed organ at birth – 90% of the brain's growth occurs in the first 5 years of life and a baby's brain doubles in weight between birth and 3. Babies are born with 100 billion brain cells, but most of them aren't connected because synapses have to be developed.

A single neuron can create up to 15,000 synaptic connections with other neurons. So, 100 billion brain cells, each potentially creating 15,000 synaptic connections – you do the math (but somebody said it was “more than all the stars in the universe”).

There are windows of time when synapses develop – the first 5 years are critical, especially the first 3. Children have 50 trillion synapses at birth, 100 trillion when they're 1. In fact, far more synapses are being developed than will be needed – a 2-year-old's brain has twice as many synapses as an adult's. (By the way, as we get older, nature “carves away” those synapses that are not needed or that are not reinforced by repetition [underlining deliberate] through a process called “neural pruning.” This process is a good thing since it creates more organized and efficient circuits later in life.)

But how are synapses developed in the first place? Through experience: through smelling, tasting, touching, hearing, and seeing. (Yes, those last two were deliberately underlined. You can probably guess where this is going, can't you?)

Storytelling and reading aloud boost synapse development and strengthens a child's vocabulary. From birth, children can distinguish among hundreds of sounds. Different sounds create a cluster of neurons in the auditory cortex that will later create a response to each sound. Storytelling and reading aloud increases the frequency and number of sounds heard, and therefore the number of neuron clusters created.

CLASS DISMISSED

So, reading and even talking to infants before they can understand the words actually changes the structure of their brains and helps them create the neural network that forms the foundation for literacy. This theory that literacy – knowing how to read and write – begins very early in life and develops over time has been called “emergent literacy.” What children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write is referred to as “early literacy.”

There are six skills that are essential for a child to get ready to read:

- Print Motivation (being interested in and enjoying books);
- Print Awareness (noticing print; knowing how to handle a book; knowing how to follow words on a page);
- Narrative Skills (being able to describe things and events and tell stories);
- Phonological Awareness (being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words);
- Language and Vocabulary (knowing the names of things); and
- Letter Knowledge (knowing letters are different from each other; knowing their names and sounds; recognizing letters everywhere).

Your program activities with infants and preschoolers promote these early literacy skills. Some connections are obvious: using picture books reinforces print motivation; holding the books, turning pages, and subtly calling attention to the words on the page makes children aware of print; and telling stories, whether read aloud or “simply” told, models and encourages narrative skills. But if you think about it for a moment, you’ll see ways in which you incorporate other literacy skills without, well, without thinking about it!

Most children who have difficulty reading have trouble with phonological awareness. Rhymes and songs help children realize that words are made up of smaller parts. Since songs have different notes and beats for each syllable in the lyrics, hearing and singing songs begins to break down words into their parts.

As I said when I began, I feel like I’m preaching to the choir: you know you are in a position to impact the literacy development of children. Each time you read a story, each time you and your preschool patrons recite a poem or sing a song, you can have a tremendous impact on their literacy development and, by extension, on their school readiness and even on their continued success in school.

But there are others who are in an even better position to help children: their parents and caregivers.

Which brings me to the Early Literacy Initiative of the Public Library Association (PLA), which began in 2000. With funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), PLA and the Association of Library Service to Children (ALSC) developed model public library programs which incorporate research-based findings concerning reading development. These findings were first summarized in the National Reading Panel’s report, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*.

This joint PLA/ALSC project has come to be known as “[Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library](#).”

In 2001, PLA contracted with researchers in the field of emergent literacy, Dr. Grover C. Whitehurst and Dr. Christopher Lonigan, to develop a model program. The result was [a set of workshops](#) developed from research-based materials that librarians may use with parents and caregivers to help them prepare children – pretalkers, talkers, and pre-readers – to read. In October 2001, twenty demonstration sites initially tested the material. In October 2002, a second year of pilot testing was conducted with [fourteen libraries](#). Staff at these libraries were trained to implement the workshops – some staff even developed [materials to use with their Spanish-speaking communities](#).

In August 2003, results of [an outcome evaluation](#) showed that the information contained in these programs was indeed incorporated into the behaviors of parents so we know workshops like these work. But if you don't have the time / resources / energy to implement a new program like this, you can still help parents be more effective "first teachers" and increase the public library's impact on children's early literacy development just by doing what you're already doing – with a twist.

In your storytimes for babies (or toddlers or preschoolers), direct a few short, instructive comments to the parents. I'm not talking about changing the focus of the program from the children to the parents or incorporating a lecture – just add a few statements here and there. “Let's sing a song! Songs help children break words into syllables.” “Let's play a rhyming game. Rhymes help children learn that words are made up of smaller parts.” “Now, I'll recap the story to help the children learn about sequence in stories.”

Here are a few more examples offered by Ellen Fader in her brief article “[How Storytimes for Preschool Children Can Incorporate Current Research](#)”:

- “Sometimes reading looks like chewing. That's okay because he's learning to feel comfortable with books. Babies who play with book will find it easier to learn to read later on.”
- “Did you know that hearing language actually changes the structure of babies' brains? Language builds more connections between neurons in the brain. So the more you talk with your baby, the more connections she will have in her brain.”
- “Toddlers are learning about nine new words a day; books are a wonderful source for this growing vocabulary!”

You can even tell them when you're about to model a technique like [dialogic reading](#) (without calling it dialogic reading): “Instead of just reading a story to the children today, I'm going to ask them to help me tell the story by asking some questions.”

One document on the PLA Early Literacy Initiative website has [suggestions of what you might say](#) to parents in relation to specific storytime components. The Early Literacy Initiative also makes available tables which describe early literacy research, suggest what the research means for parents, and offer tips for incorporating the research into storytime and library settings. These tables are specific to all your preschool populations: [newborn to two-year-olds](#), [two- and three-year-olds](#), and [four- and five-year-olds](#).

As Fader suggests, “storytime will still be fun if these techniques are used judiciously: some in every program but not every technique with every book.”

Whatever you do, the most essential message to convey to parents and caregivers is that it’s critical that the reading experience be a pleasurable one for the children. They should share books when everybody – parent/caregiver and child – is in a good mood. As the tables mentioned above say, “Positive interactions around books will lead to more regular and frequent book sharing experiences. Conversely, negative interactions make the young child less interested in books and reading.”

And aren’t “positive interactions around books” at the heart of your preschool programs?

Have any questions about incorporating early literacy research in your storytimes? Any tips to share? Why not get a discussion going on NCKIDS? (What? You don’t subscribe to NCKIDS? It’s easy to join!)



What is NCKnows?

NCKnows is a virtual reference service coordinated by the State Library of North Carolina. Users connect online, in real time, with a specially trained librarian for help with any topic or information need.

NCKnows is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at <http://www.cumberland.lib.nc.us>

How does it work?

NCKnows enables North Carolinians to connect online with trained librarians who send the most relevant web sites and other information directly to their computer. Answers are provided to what you need, when you need it, while you wait. Librarians throughout North Carolina and the rest of the US work together to ensure that all questions are fully answered.

When did it start?

NCKnows was launched in February 2004 through a federal Library Services and Technology Act grant awarded to the State Library of North Carolina. Staff from 18 North Carolina public and academic libraries have been trained using specialized software to provide virtual reference service to North Carolinians.

What answers are available?

Trained librarians answer questions for all ages on all topics.

Questions have included:

“What procedures do you follow to get a public building named for an individual?”

“I am trying to get answers to a question in which I have to identify the dominant economic characteristics of the food and beverage industry. I have no idea where to start.”

“I need some articles about Bratz Dolls.”

To find out more: Contact Gloria Nelson, 910-483-7727 ext. 208

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Award Winning Program at the Perry Library

By Claire Basney, Head of Youth Services

Every year, North Carolina Public Library Director's Association gives out awards for outstanding children's and young adult programs. H. Leslie Perry Memorial Library of Henderson, NC received the 2002-2003 award for Outstanding Children's Program for its preteen-teen reading program, the **Reading Bunch**.

The criteria for winning an outstanding program award are: program originality, innovativeness, ability to be copied in other libraries, quality of publicity and promotional materials, staff involvement, involvement with other community organizations, relation to the library's mission, and the program's success.

The Reading Bunch program is designed to lead reluctant readers into reading for pleasure by exposing them to books covering issues they find relevant and interesting, and encouraging discussion and activities centered around those issues.

Reading Bunch began in 2000 as a simple community Program. It then narrowed its focus to preteen and teen readers, being the first program of its kind at Perry Library to do so which greatly expanded its membership. In the past three and a half years, over 75 young people—representing many different schools and neighborhoods—have given their hours to reading and the challenging (and fun) activities that go with it

Perry Library's mission is to provide its community with services, resources, and information for lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, daily living, and leisure activity. The **Reading Bunch** brings both reading resources and the enrichment that comes with them to the young people of Vance County. These young people, in turn, have earned themselves and their library this award through their warm reception of books and their excitement over reading and learning.

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MUSIC FILLS THE AIR EVERY MARCH AT CUMBERLAND COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY & INFORMATION CENTER

By Loree Kelly

Since 1986, the Youth Services staff at the Cumberland County Public Library & Information Center (CCPL&IC) in Fayetteville has hosted the very popular Lollipop Concerts for preschoolers in the community. This March proved to be another successful year for these special programs that are a collaborative effort between the public library and the Cumberland County schools. The library held seven Lollipop Concerts (one at each location) with a total of 880 children, parents, and day care teachers attending.

Lollipop concerts started in 1986 at CCPL&IC when a staff member suggested that her daughter's school orchestra play for preschoolers at the library. Preschoolers, parents and day care teachers have looked forward to these program ever since.

Lollipop Concerts are programs designed to expose preschoolers to orchestral and choral music. They also provide middle school or high school students the opportunity to perform in a non-threatening environment to a friendly audience.

Youth Services managers contact orchestra or chorus instructors of area schools each December to arrange for these programs to be held in March. Concerts are usually scheduled in place of our regular weekly preschool story time so we have a built in audience. The programs are advertised in the library's Calendar of Events, the local newspaper and the community TV station. On the day of the concert, as many as 25 to 30 middle school or high school students arrive with their instructor to perform for preschoolers and their parents. The library also invites day care groups to attend these concerts and registration is required for groups of six or more.

Continued.....

If an orchestra is playing at the library, the instructor tells the children about each instrument and the students play songs that highlight each instrument. Well known nursery rhymes like Mary Had a Little Lamb or Disney songs are performed.

However, not all programs feature nursery rhymes or Disney tunes. At our Headquarters Library, students from Terry Sanford High School performed Camille Saint-Saens' Carnival of the Animals this year. Kids were picked out of the audience to wear masks of the animals being represented by the different movements of the piece. Two hundred and fifty people attended this particular concert and everyone appeared to have a wonderful time.

At the end of the concert, children can talk to the orchestra students and their instructor about all the instruments and get a closer look at them. Chorus groups sing nursery rhymes and Disney songs and get the kids to join in with them. At our East Regional location, the chorus instructor from Mac Williams Middle School had preschoolers singing and dancing to many favorite nursery rhymes, Disney tunes and camp songs!

Lollipop Concerts are informal, fun, collaborative programs that are relatively easy to arrange and benefit both the public library and local schools. Consider hosting a Lollipop Concert and see for yourself!

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From the Editor.....

I invite our readership to submit articles to the programs, or interesting projects, or upcoming events whereby all readers may be informed or even motivated to try something new. There is no deadline.

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