

Hooray for Research

A Glimpse at an Early Literacy Project

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Have you ever been asked for research that establishes the value of storytimes? Or asked to demonstrate that storytimes or other early literacy work support reading readiness efforts? Are you being asked to validate how you do storytimes or what you include in your storytimes? If any of this sounds familiar, you are not alone.

For more than ten years, public libraries have been declaring that by sharing early literacy concepts with parents and caregivers and incorporating quality techniques into early literacy programs, including storytimes, there is a positive impact on the reading readiness of children who attend library programs. However, until now there has been very little research to assess this effectiveness.

And in today's outcome-driven world, everyone wants to be able to claim their work is demonstrating best practices and is based on research that establishes its worth.

In 2009, guided by Dr. Eliza T. Dresang, the iSchool at University of Washington, embarked on a project called VIEWS (Valuable Initiatives in Early Learning that Work Successfully). This project used the Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR) model with six early literacy skills: (1) phonological awareness, (2) letter knowledge, (3) narrative skills, (4) vocabulary, (5) print awareness, and (6) print motivation. That original Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) planning grant morphed into the research grant VIEWS2. Now librarians can reap the benefits of research measuring early literacy behaviors in children who attend public library programs.

The study has completed two years of data collection in a quasi-experimental model. Forty libraries across Washington State were randomly selected from small, medium, and large library systems. Year one uncovered a correlation between the early literacy concepts the librarians exhibited during their

Stay up-to-date on Project VIEWS2 at University of Washington's Digital Youth website, digitallyouth.ischool.uw.edu. Or via Twitter @UW_VIEWS2, or Facebook /VIEWS2. To see some of the information right now, go to <http://everychildreadytoread.ning.com>.

storytime and the early literacy behaviors demonstrated by the children who attended. This relationship means that VIEWS2 discovered that storytimes affect literacy development. During year two the participating libraries were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The training for the experimental librarians focused on phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge—two early literacy principles shown by prior research to be strong predictors of later reading readiness.

They were also given the observational tools used by the researchers and encouraged to use them as planning tools. Additionally, increasing storytime interactivity and dialogic reading provided frameworks for incorporating these principles. Meanwhile, the control group conducted business as usual. Results from year two demonstrated that when librarians used these tools for planning, more early literacy behaviors were observed in their storytimes.

What we know: Purposeful focus on early literacy concepts makes a difference in storytimes and in children's early literacy behaviors.

What does this mean for us? One study participant said, "This study tells us what concepts we need to focus on and if we concentrate on them with intent, we can improve what we are doing, which could make a big difference. It also tells us that what we do makes an impact on early literacy and validates what we are doing. It helps us to become leaders in children's early literacy in our communities."

What's next? The research team has released the project website (views2.ischool.uw.edu) so visit the site and read more about the project, take a look at the planning tools, and watch training videos filmed by librarians in the study. The research team is also preparing the in-depth publication detailing the complete study and results. 

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