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The extent to which New Jersey public librarians promote early literacy skills

Kathleen M. Kelley
Rowan University

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THE EXTENT TO WHICH NEW JERSEY PUBLIC LIBRARIANS
PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY SKILLS

by
Kathleen M. Kelley

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 1, 2006

Approved by
Advisor

Date Approved May 1, 2006

ABSTRACT

Kathleen M. Kelley
THE EXTENT TO WHICH NEW JERSEY PUBLIC LIBRARIANS
PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY SKILLS
2005/2006
Dr. Marilyn Shontz
Program in School and Public Librarianship

The purpose of this study was to determine, through the use of a questionnaire, the extent to which New Jersey public librarians were providing and promoting early literacy skills in their weekly preschool storytimes; the use by these librarians of the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy initiative, as well as the ways in which these librarians were accomplishing these tasks. This study also compared preschool storytimes offered by selected public librarians to Head Start programs and local nursery schools for children from birth to age five.

Responses to the questionnaire showed that all the participating public librarians used a variety of methods in their weekly preschool storytimes to promote the six pre-reading skills identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read*. However, only 16% of the respondents use the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy program for the purposes for which it was designed: training sessions for parents, caregivers, and outreach programs. Also 90 of the 107 respondents were not using the early literacy program in their libraries. A majority of the respondents also provided some outreach storytimes in their communities for children from birth to age five.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated, with all my love, to my husband and my children.

Thank you all for your constant support, patience and your love.

We got through this together.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Following the publication of the Carnegie Foundation report, "Ready to Learn,

A Mandate for the Nation" in 1991, states across the nation began developing early

literacy programs to help children get ready to learn to read and write when they begin

school. These programs addressed many of the fundamental pre-reading skills

to be taught by preschool and kindergarten teachers (Boyer, 1991).

In 2000, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

(NICHD) and the Public Library Association (PLA) a division of the American

Library Association (ALA) created the Preschool Literacy Initiative; a project

intended to promote the importance of this research to parents and caregivers

through the various resources available at public libraries. Included in this

project was the confirmation that learning to read is not instinctual, but must be

taught (Arnold, 2003).

Recognizing the important role public libraries can and do have in those

pre-school years, *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library*, an early literacy project, was

developed in 2001 by the joint efforts of the Association for Library Services to Children

(ALSC) and the Public Library Association (PLA), both divisions of the American

Library Association (ALA) (PLA, 2002).

This early literacy initiative is intended for public libraries to provide training, workshops, demonstrations, and print materials to other librarians, parents and caregivers of pre-school children from birth to age five. *Every Child Ready to Read* addresses six fundamental pre-reading skills that are carried across three age groups: "Early Talkers": birth to two-years old, "Talkers": two- and three-year olds, and "Pre-Readers": four- and five-year olds. This program is not designed to teach children how to read; instead it teaches parents, caregivers, librarians and adults who work with children how to prepare children to get ready to learn to read when they begin formal schooling.

Statement of Problem

Research in the fields of reading and child development over the past decade identified six fundamental pre-reading skills necessary for children to enter school ready to learn to read and write. Recognizing the important role public libraries can and do have in those pre-school years, *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library*, an early literacy project, was developed by the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC), divisions of the American Library Association (ALA) (PLA, 2002).

This early literacy initiative was designed for public librarians and public libraries to provide training, workshops, demonstrations, and print materials to other librarians, parents and caregivers of pre-school children from birth to age five. *Every Child Ready to Read* also acknowledges the vital role of the parent as the child's first teacher (PLA, 2002).Origins for this program were based, in part, on the results of the 1991 Carnegie

Foundation report, *Ready to Learn, A Mandate for the Nation*, which provided statistics

showing that "children who start school behind typically stay behind." This report also

addressed the importance of "parent education programs in the preschool

period...suggesting that parents are the first and most essential teachers, and this means

helping their children discover the miracle and majesty of words" (Boyer 1991, p. 55).

Resources for *Every Child Ready to Read* were also based, in part, on the results

of the 1997 study *Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Development*, by Rima

Shore.

<div align="center">Rationale</div>

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which public librarians

and public libraries in New Jersey were providing and promoting early literacy skills;

the use by these public librarians and libraries of the *Every Child Ready to Read* early

literacy initiative, as well as the ways in which they were accomplishing these tasks.

This study also compared preschool storytimes offered by these public libraries to Head

Start programs and local nursery schools for children from birth to age five in New

Jersey. Questions addressed included:

1. What was the frequency and content of preschool storytimes implemented by

    public librarians in New Jersey?

2. To what extent were public librarians and libraries in New Jersey addressing,

    in their preschool storytimes, the six pre-reading skills identified by the

    research ?

3. Were public librarians and libraries in New Jersey offering preschool storytimes

    as outreach programs? If so, what was the frequency and content of those

<div align="center">3</div>

preschool storytimes?

4. In what ways did public librarians working with children up to age five
   change their preschool storytimes to better address the six pre-reading skills
   identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy initiative?

5. How successful did public librarians, working with children from birth to
   age five, consider the early literacy initiative program *Every Child Ready to Read*
   to be for them and for their audiences?

Definition of Terms

Early literacy: what children know about reading and writing before they can
actually read and write (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2004).

Emergent literacy: literacy development is seen as emerging from children's
oral language development and their initial, often unconventional attempts at
reading (usually based on pictures) and writing (at first, scribbling) hence the term
emergent literacy. Within an emergent literacy framework, children's early
unconventional attempts at reading and writing are respected as legitimate
beginnings of literacy (Rabe, 1998).

Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library (*Every Child Ready to Read*): an early
literacy project designed to provide public librarians with research-based tools to
help children develop the early literacy skills they need to become successful
readers by helping parents and caregivers become aware that learning to read is
not instinctual, but must be taught. This preschool literacy initiative focuses
attention on activities which help develop the six early-learning literacy skills

and on the parents or adults who are the essential participants in children's learning.

Every Child Ready to Read, the result of the combined efforts of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the American Library Association (ALA), the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC), was designed for public librarians and libraries to provide training workshops, demonstrations, guidelines and print materials to other librarians, parents and caregivers of pre-school children from birth to age five.

The PLA and the ALSC have incorporated the latest research into a series of parent and caregiver workshops to provide public libraries with vital tools to help prepare parents for their critical role as their child's first teacher. These tools were developed by Dr. Grover C. Whitehurst and Dr. Christopher Lonigan, well-known researchers in emergent literacy, and have been tested and refined by library demonstrations sites around the country (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2004).

Literacy: The ability to read and write (*Webster's*, 1991).

Outreach programs: for the purposes of this study preschool storytimes are those which public librarians take to local Head Start programs and nursery schools.

Preschool storytimes: for the purposes of this study early literacy programs and activities are those offered in the library by New Jersey public librarians for children from birth to age five which include any or all of the following: an opening exercise, storybook reading, storytelling, nursery rhymes, music and songs, finger plays, arts and crafts, role playing, and / or computer activities.

Public library: A public library is established under state enabling laws or

    regulations to serve a community, district, or region, and provides at least

    the following: an organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a

    combination thereof; a paid staff; an established schedule in which services of the

    staff are available to the public; the facilities necessary to support such a

    collection, staff, and schedule, and is supported in whole or part with public funds

    (NCES Library Statistics Program, n.d.).

Six Pre-Reading Skills addressed by the *Every Child Ready to Read* program:

- Print Motivation - A child's interest in and enjoyment of books.

- Vocabulary - Knowing the names of things.

- Print Awareness - Noticing print, knowing how to handle a book, and how
  a child follows the written words on a page.

- Letter Knowledge - Learning to name letters and to recognize them
  everywhere.

- Narrative Skills - The ability to describe things and events and to tell
  stories.

- Phonological Awareness - The ability to hear and play with the smaller
  sounds in words (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2004)

Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumed that all New Jersey public children's librarians offered some

type of preschool storytime and were aware of and had access to information about the

Every Child Ready to Read early literacy initiative. It also assumed that the role of the

public library and early literacy development was accepted by the librarians working in

the public libraries of New Jersey.

This study was limited to responses made by children's librarians and librarians working in the Youth Services departments of 210 public libraries in the New Jersey. No attempt was made to identify or compare the size of the responding libraries.

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CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Background

As part of the national study, Assessment of the Role of School and Public

Libraries in Support of Educational Reform, 1998-2000, Steven Herb examined the

recent literature and research concerned with child development, early literacy, and

public library services to young children and their families, and the possible effects

of those services on preschool learning. As a result of this review Herb found that:

> The American public library's democratic service mission, coupled with
>
> its ability to provide children with appropriate preschool educational
>
> experiences, has the potential benefit of preparing all children to be
>
> ready to learn when they enter school. The types of learning experiences
>
> naturally suited to public library services and library-community partnerships
>
> are those in the area of literacy, the crucial foundation for the learning that
>
> takes place both in and out of school (Herb, 2001).

Herb further stated that "the learning that takes place in the preschool years is the

foundation upon which all learning is built." The major focus of his manuscript was

on "the public library's contribution to school readiness through the provision of

literacy experiences for preschoolers and the support of parents' and caregivers'

efforts to provide those experiences" (Herb, p. 1).

In a study conducted in 1995 by the National Center for Education Statistics, 86% of public librarians surveyed reported that they offered programs for preschool and kindergarten children. A total of 40% of those libraries also offered programs for infants and toddlers, while 66% worked with preschools, and 56% worked with day care centers. "Clearly, public libraries already accept their role in providing readiness activities for preschoolers" (Herb, p.3).

As a result of this literature and research review Herb stated that "programs created to enhance literacy in public libraries should be designed, implemented and evaluated within the following framework":

(a) Provide children with opportunities to interact around literacy-related events with someone who knows the children well and is skillful in pacing their learning.

(b) Provide literacy experiences that are characterized by active and meaningful involvement.

(c) Provide literacy models whom children are likely to imitate-persons children respect and with whom they share some similarities.

(d) Provide literacy programs that are rooted in the child's socio-cultural world (Herb, p.15).

In summary, the author stated:

Public libraries have demonstrated their dispositions and abilities to collaborate, to be resourceful, to be adaptable, and to work with a range of communities. Public libraries have been, and continue to be, engaged in the best practices known to the early childhood education field while carrying out their commitment to working with children and their families in ongoing programs,

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as well as seeking out unserved children and their families. Furthermore, because of their missions to serve all children, as well as their goals for training and recruiting staff, public libraries are unique among public education service providers. The public library is often the only agency poised to reach those children not being served by various educational programs (e.g., Head Start and early intervention). (Herb, p. 22)

Research

Public Library Outreach Programs

In 1998 Fehrenbach, Hurford, Brannock, and Fehrenbach conducted a study, in Kansas, concerned with the emergent literacy development of preschool children using a library outreach program. Recognizing that public libraries have a long history of serving children through story times and summer reading programs, "yet many children remain unserved. To reach all children ... we must go to those who do not walk through our doors" (Fehrenbach, 1998).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate a public library outreach program that was developed to promote emerging literacy behaviors in preschoolers. Twenty-nine children from three preschool classes participated in the study. Assessment of the effectiveness of the program involved three variables: emergent literacy behaviors, pre-reading skills, and reading. Definitions were given for all terms, and each variable was defined in detail. After two weeks of assessment, the training began using data collection through observations (Fehrenbach, p. 3).

The results of the study indicated that "children who have been exposed to a library outreach literacy training in preschool demonstrate a greater number of emergent literacy behaviors and pre-reading skills and read significantly more words correctly than children in the control group" (Fehrenbach, p. 4).

The authors acknowledged the small sample size; however, "the results of the statistical analysis are strong. Future research should replicate the study with larger sample sizes" (Fehrenbach, p. 4).

Research

Parental Involvement in Early Literacy

Senechal and LeFevre conducted a 5-year longitudinal study in Ontario, Canada with the purpose of examining the pathways from children's early knowledge and experiences through to fluent reading with a focus on how parental involvement was related to the development of reading skills. This study used a sample group of 168 middle and upper class children (Senechal, 2002).

The notion that including parents in children's academic development can critically enhance their performance has been supported in a variety of research contexts. Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998) conducted an intervention study designed to increase the vocabulary skills of 3and 4 year old children. Teachers and parents were trained to read to the children using dialogic reading in which they were encouraged to pose questions to the children. Lonigan and Whitehurst found that the intervention was most effective when parents as well as teachers were trained. (Senechal, p. 445)

All terms were defined and the purpose of the study stated clearly with three objectives: to assess the relative importance of parent-child storybook reading to the development of children's receptive language and emergent literacy; to assess the relationship between early literacy experiences and future reading acquisition; and to assess the relationship between early literacy experiences and fluent reading. Three sample groups were used in this study, two groups of kindergarten children and one group of first grade children. All three groups were followed through the third grade. Complete descriptions of each sample group and definitions of the measures used to assess literacy experiences, language and emergent literacy were given in complete detail. Results of the 5-year study "suggest clear links from home experiences, through early literacy skills, to fluent reading" (Senechal, p. 455).

Research

Parents and Early Literacy

In 2002-2003 the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC) conducted a study of the impact of using research-based early literacy practices in public library programs for parents and caregivers. The purpose was twofold: "what effect do public libraries have on parent and caregiver education for early literacy, and when parents and caregivers of low-income children participate in early literacy programs sponsored by the public library and designed by the PLA/ALSC Early Literacy Initiative, do parents and caregivers understand and use best practices presented in the programs?" (ALA, 2003).

Fourteen public libraries from twelve states participated in the evaluation, and positive and negative outcomes were reported. Standardized presentation scripts, video clips, handouts and four guiding questions were presented at a training session for all libraries involved. Intake and outcome data were collected and presented in clear, easy to read charts and graphs. Training would be needed to duplicate this study with any degree of reliability, as was shown by the 2001-2002 PLA/ALSC Early Literacy Initiative evaluation that reported that the study "suffered from lack of research control" (ALA, p. 6).

Results from the evaluation showed that parents who participated in public library early literacy programs significantly increased their literacy behaviors. Levels of library use increased for both parents and caregivers following the training sessions (ALA, p. 47-48).

Research

Survey of Public Library Preschool Programs

In 2001 an evaluation of the role of public libraries in children's literacy development was conducted in Pennsylvania. Rather than a clearly stated purpose, the authors wrote, "This evaluation examines a crucial facet of public libraries' services: children's summer reading and preschool programs. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, this evaluation examines how children's preschool and summer reading programs contribute to their reading skills" (Celano, 2001).

Both survey and observations at public libraries were used to collect data from

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the sample group of 204 public libraries, representing small, medium and large public libraries across that state.

A total of 94% of the libraries sampled were offering programs or activities designed for preschool children, while only 5.5% offered no preschool programs. Data also included the number of children served weekly at all the public libraries surveyed: small, medium and large public libraries (Celano, p. 25).

Findings from these data indicated that "library programs do more than encourage a love a reading; they offer opportunities for children to develop literacy skills. These programs also encourage children to spend time with books, and encourage parents and caregivers to become involved in the children's reading" (Celano, p. 48). The authors also concluded that the "findings underscore the important position the library plays in the reading achievement of all children" (Celano, p. 48).

Summary

According to the research, public libraries and librarians do perform a crucial role as early literacy providers. Libraries and librarians "can be teachers and role models for helping to build the foundation for the literacy skills a child will develop when school age and will use throughout life. Moving beyond the traditional library patron, librarians are offering story times for younger children and holding instructional workshops for the adults who live and work with children" (Ernst, 2001).

According to a presentation to the Second White House Conference on Library and Information Services: Kids Need Libraries, "the public library provides the transition from babyhood into formal learning ... and the transition from structured learning into

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self-determined life-long learning" (Mathews, 1990). This report also stressed the many

resources the public library provides to other agencies working with preschool children:

collaboration with child care services; sharing books and other materials; offering

training for staff and volunteers; reinforcing family involvement in early learning by

modeling good learning habits, and to "entice youth to visit and use the library through

booktalks, outreach activities, and by developing interesting learning activities with

teachers and other community leaders" (Mathews, p. 202-203).

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study examined the extent to which public librarians and public libraries in

New Jersey were promoting early literacy through preschool storytimes; instruction and

training for parents and caregivers; and preschool storytimes offered by the public

libraries to Head Start programs and local nursery schools for children from birth to age

five in New Jersey. Questions addressed included:

1. What was the frequency and content of preschool storytimes implemented by

    public librarians in New Jersey?

2. To what extent were public librarians and libraries in New Jersey addressing,

    in their preschool storytimes, the six pre-reading skills identified by the research ?

3. Were public librarians and libraries in New Jersey offering preschool

    storytimes as outreach programs? If so, what was the frequency and content

    of those preschool storytimes?

4. In what ways did public librarians working with children up to age five

    change their preschool storytimes to better address the six pre-reading skills

    identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy initiative?

5. How successful did public librarians, working with children from birth to age

    five, consider the early literacy initiative program *Every Child Ready to Read* to

    be for them and for their audiences?

Population and Sample

The population was all 455 public libraries listed in the 2005 *Official Directory*

of New Jersey Libraries and Media Centers. From this population a sample of 210 public

libraries was selected representing all twenty-one counties in New Jersey. Sample size

was determined using the recommended sample size chart in Powell's *Basic Research*

Methods for Librarians (Powell, 2004, p. 107).

Variables

The independent variable was the use of preschool storytimes by the 210 New

Jersey public libraries surveyed. Variables investigated included the number of

preschool storytimes provided by the sample New Jersey public libraries; the variety

of activities included in these preschool storytimes; and the instruction and /or training

presented to parents and caregivers during these preschool storytimes. Other variables

were the number and frequency of outreach programs offered by these libraries, and the

comparison of preschool storytimes presented at the library to those provided as outreach

programs. This study also determined the knowledge and use of the *Every Child Ready*

to Read@ Your Library early literacy incentive by children's librarians working in

public libraries in New Jersey.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) developed for this research was based on the survey used by Celano and Neuman in their study of *The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development, 2001*. Most of the questions designed and used in that survey could be applied to any library for the same purpose. One exception was question #3 of the Preschool Program open-ended question section, which referred to the Pennsylvania academic standards. Separate surveys were given for measuring summer reading programs and preschool reading programs at the Pennsylvania state public libraries (Celano, p. 51-54). For this research, no background or personal information of the respondents was collected.

Questions 1 through 5 of the survey addressed the number, frequency, length and content of the preschool storytimes presented at New Jersey public libraries, as well as the number of children attending those storytimes. Public librarians were also asked about methods of advertising preschool storytimes implemented by their library.

Questions 6 through 9 of the survey asked public librarians about outreach programs to Head Start and local nursery schools, library visits by Head Start and local nursery school classes; and the comparison of outreach preschool storytime content to that of the preschool storytimes offered at the library.

Questions 10 to 13 asked public librarians about their awareness, access, and use of the materials provided by the *Every Child Ready To Read* early literacy initiative program.

Data Collection

A questionnaire (see Appendix B) consisting of twelve discrete questions and one continuous, open-ended question, and a cover letter (see Appendix B) with instructions were mailed on January 26, 2006 to the 210 New Jersey public libraries. A stamped return envelope was provided as well as an e-mail address for requesting a copy of the research results. Mailed questionnaires were coded using PO Box numbers on the return address. This design was used to encourage honest answers and to guarantee confidentiality for the respondent. The identification codes were used only as a guide for a second mailing.

On February 18, 2006 questionnaires were mailed to 112 librarians who had not responded to the first survey. A stamped return envelope was provided as well as a cover letter and an e-mail address for requesting a copy of the research results.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was established through evaluation and pretesting by three public children's librarians who were not included in the sample. Based on the pretest, needed changes were made to the survey and cover letter. Reliability was also ensured by using a number of questions based on the Pennsylvania study: *The Role Of Public Libraries In Children's Literacy Development: An Evaluation Report* (Celano, p. 53-54).

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CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Response to Questionnaire

On January 26, 2006 questionnaires consisting of twelve discrete questions and one

continuous, open-ended question and a cover letter with instructions, were mailed to 210

children's librarians in public libraries throughout New Jersey. A stamped return envelope

was provided as well as an e-mail address for requesting a copy of the research results.

Return envelopes for these questionnaires were coded using Post Office Box numbers in

the return address. This design was used to encourage honest answers and to guarantee

confidentiality for the respondent. The identification codes were used only as a guide for

a second mailing.

On February 10, 2006, a second mailing was sent to the 112 public children's

librarians who had not yet responded. A total of 107 surveys were returned for a

response rate of 51%.

Statistical Analysis

Questionnaires were given number codes to be used for information for the

research and for the second mailing. Survey questions were entered and tallied using a

Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Presentation of Results

Preschool Storytime Characteristics

Of the 107 participating respondents, the majority, or 65% of the public

children's librarians, offered fewer than 5 weekly preschool storytimes. Only 9%

of the responding children's librarians offered more than 10 weekly preschool

storytimes (Figure 1).

Figure 2 reports the results of the second question asking respondents about early

literacy activities included in their weekly preschool storytimes. A total 5 of the

categories: storybook reading, finger plays, storytelling, arts & crafts, music and songs,

were used by at least 80% of the responding children's librarians. Rarely used activities

included role playing, computer activities, rhythm, dance, games and toys.

The percentage of the number of children attending weekly preschool storytimes

at responding public libraries is reported in Figure 3. A total of 47% or 51 of 107 of the

participating children's librarians reported less than 50 children per week, while only 5%

or 6 of 107 reported more than 200 children attending weekly preschool storytimes.

When asked about the average length of their weekly preschool storytimes, a total

of 85% of the participating public children's librarians reported weekly storytimes of 30

minutes to one hour, while 15% of these respondents offered weekly preschool

storytimes of less than 30 minutes. No respondents reported weekly preschool storytimes

longer than one hour (Figure 4).

Figure 5 shows the various methods used by the responding public children's

librarians to advertise their weekly preschool storytimes. More than 90% of the

Figure 1
Number of Weekly Public Library Preschool Storytimes
n = 107

more than 10 preschool
storytimes
9%

6 to 10 preschool
storytimes
26%

5 or less preschool
storytimes
65%
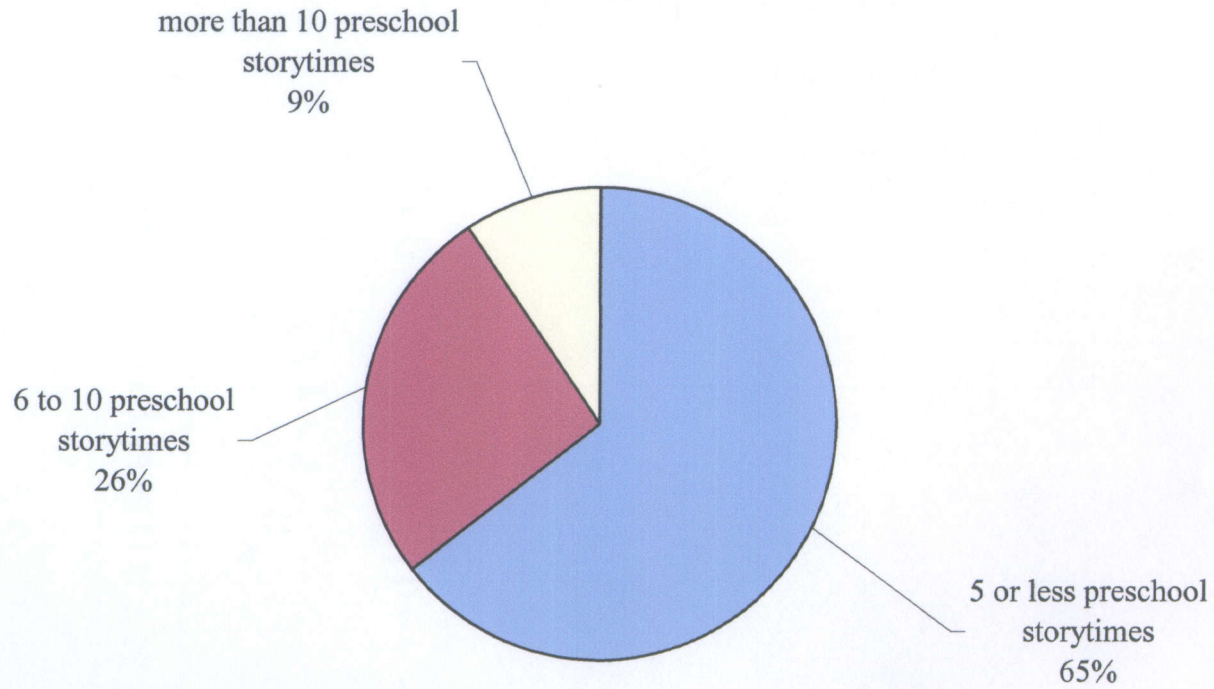
☐ 5 or less preschool storytimes ☐ 6 to 10 preschool storytimes ☐ more than 10 storytimes

Figure 2
Activities Incorporated in Weekly Public Library Preschool Storytimes
n = 107
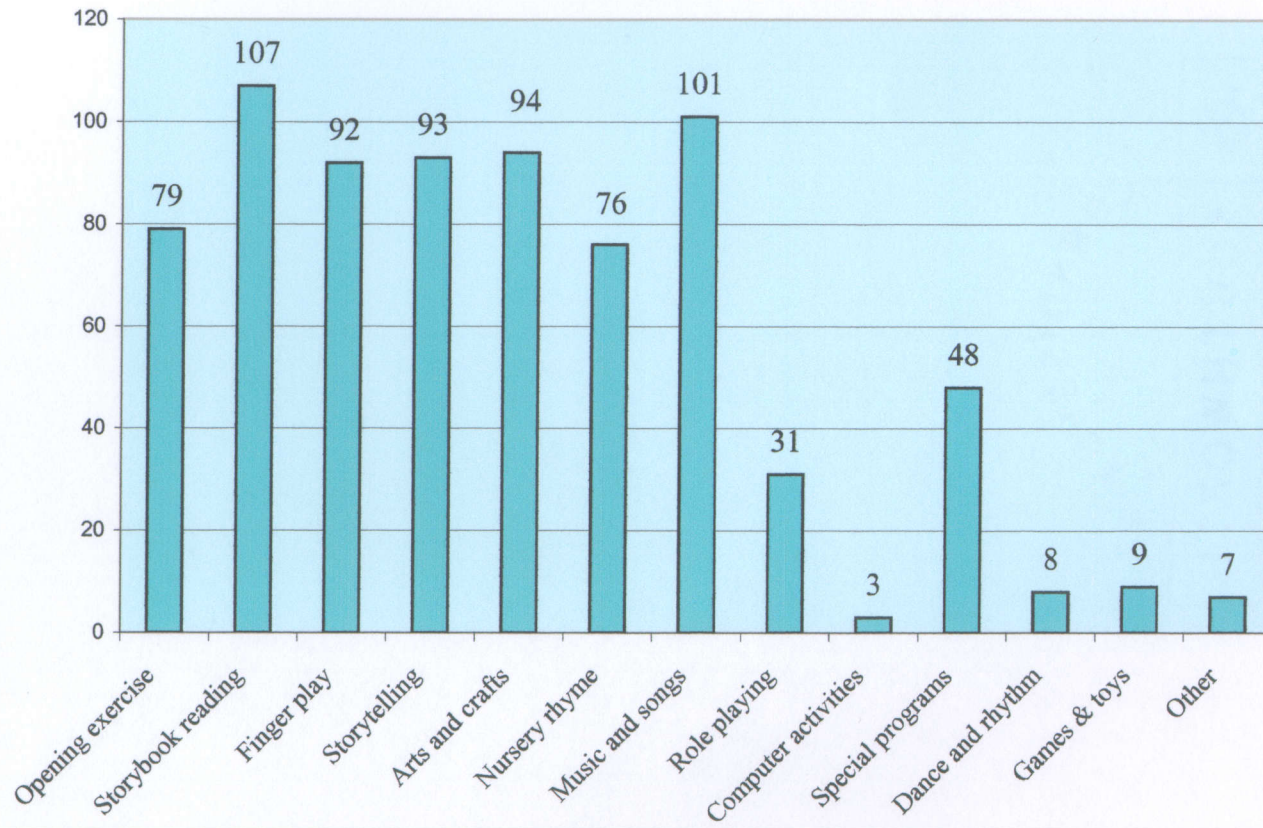
Figure 3
Number of Children Attending Weekly Public Library Preschool Storytimes
n = 107

6, 6%

16, 15%

51, 47%

34, 32%
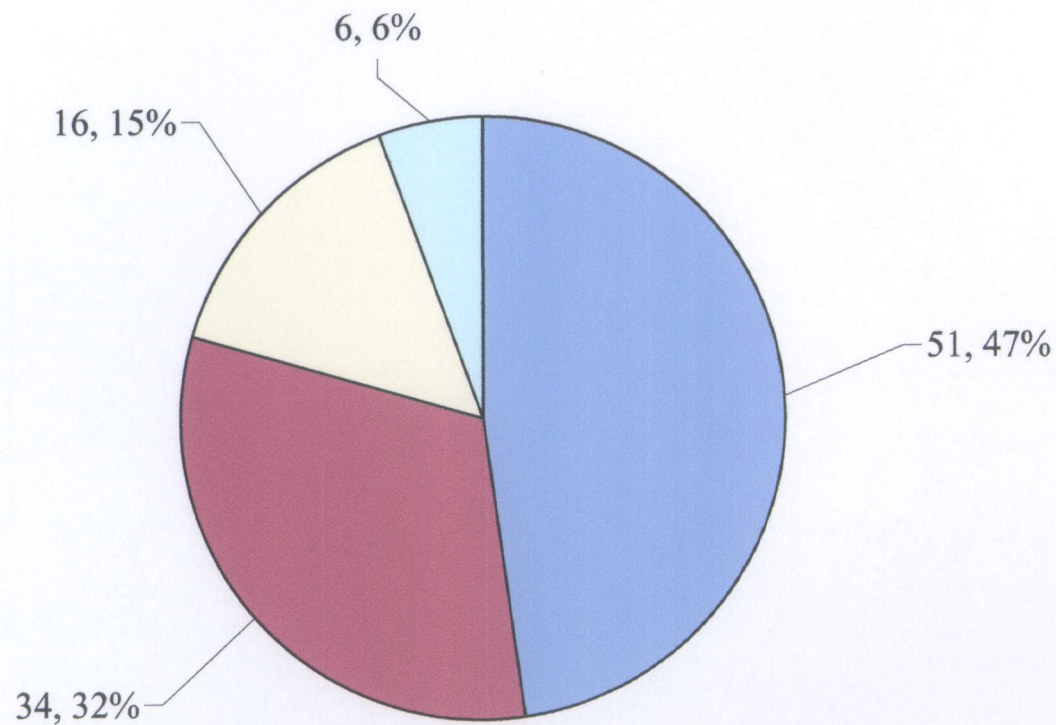
☐ Less than 50   ☐ 51 to 100   ☐ 101 to 200   ☐ More than 200

Figure 4
Average Length of Weekly Public Library Preschool Storytimes
n = 107

More than 1 hour
0

Less than 30 minutes
18

30 minutes to 1 hour
89
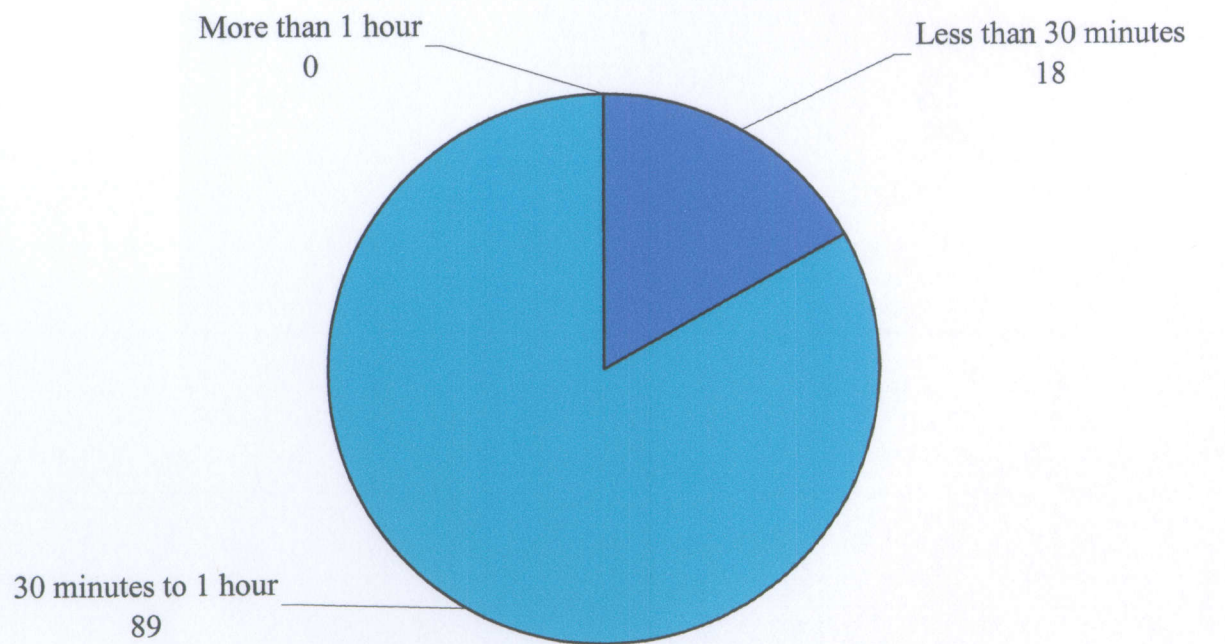
☐ Less than 30 minutes ☐ 30 minutes to 1 hour ☐ More than 1 hour

Figure 5
Methods Used to Advertise Weekly Public Library Preschool Storytimes
n = 107

Method	Count
In-house posters, flyers	92
Library newsletters	64
Press releases to local newspapers	94
Program calendar on library homepage	99
Mailings	18
Cable access TV	6
Other	6
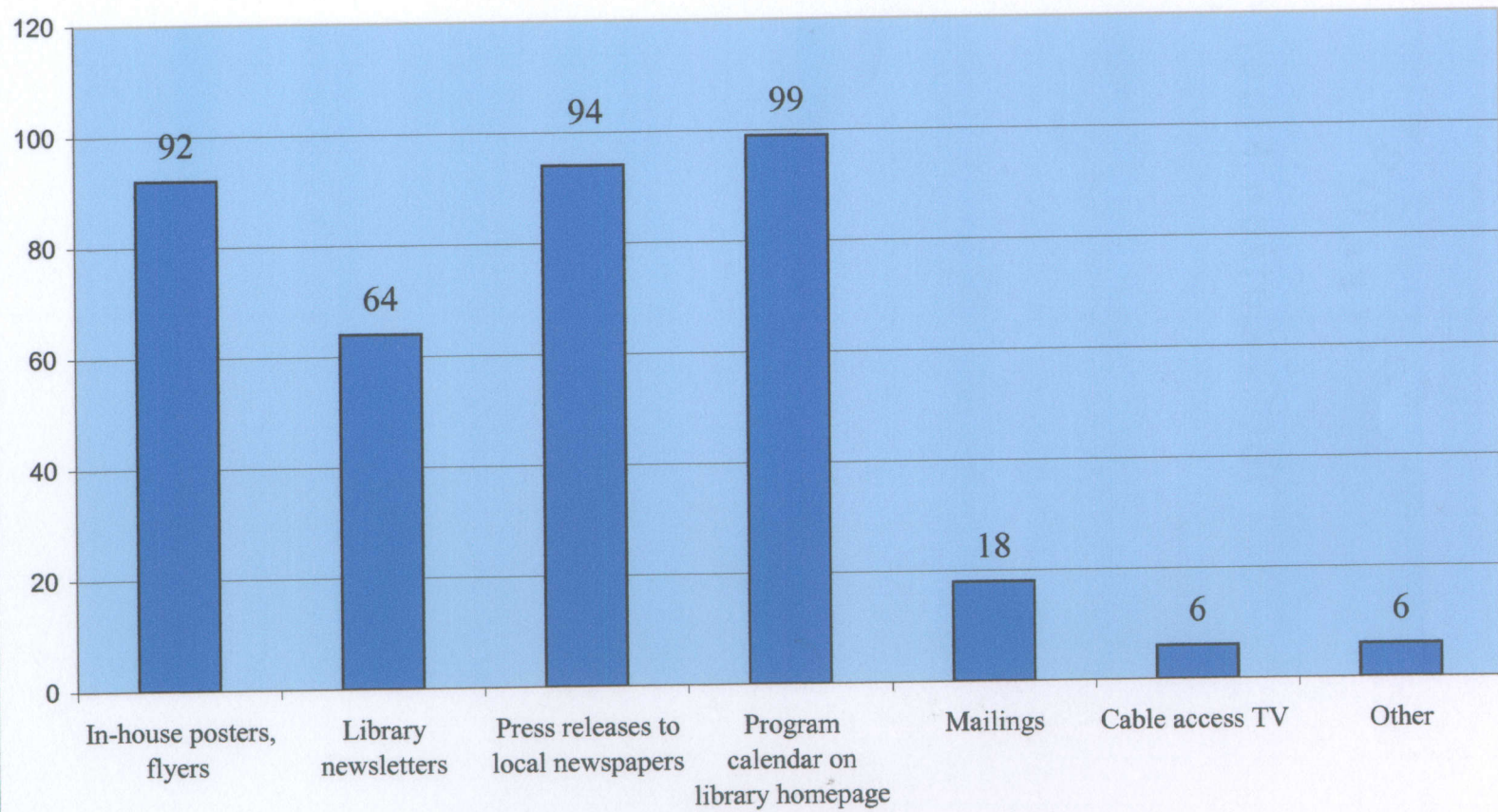
participating children's public librarians relied on the Program calendar on their library

Web page, press releases to local newspapers and in-house posters and flyers to advertise

the weekly preschool storytimes at their libraries.

Outreach Programs and Library Class Visits

Figure 6 reports the number of preschool monthly visits to the library as a class
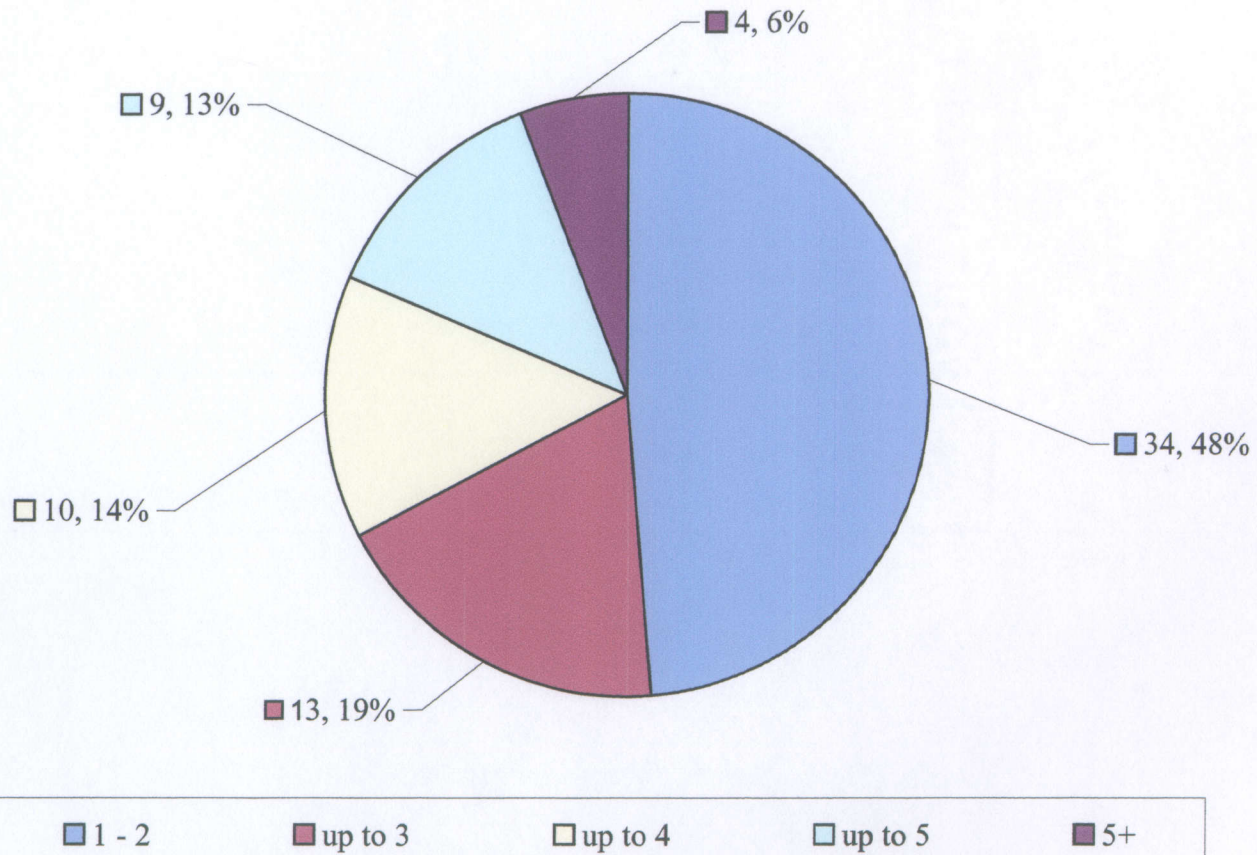
trip. Although 85 responding public children's librarians replied yes, 15 did not specify

the number of monthly class visits to their library. Of the 70 respondents who did

complete this question, 4 respondents had 5 or more preschool class visits per month,

while 34 of the respondents had at least 2 preschool visits per month.

Question 7 asked if the public children's librarian offered outreach storytimes to

Head Start programs and local nursery schools. In other words, did the public children's

librarian take the storytimes to the local schools? Of the 107 responding children's

librarians, 45% did provide preschool storytimes outside the library, while 55% did not

offer that service.

Of the 48 responding public children's librarians who offered outreach storytimes

at other sites, 41 of these librarians went to 5 or less sites per month, while only 3 of

these librarians offered more than 10 outreach storytimes outside the library per month.

Question 9 asked if these preschool outreach storytimes were the same as those

offered at the weekly preschool storytimes at the library. A total of 24 of the responding

public children's librarians replied yes, while 24 replied that there were differences

between the preschool storytimes offered at the library and those storytimes presented to

the outreach programs offered at local schools.

Figure 6
Number of Monthly Visits as a Class Trip to the Public Library
n = 70

Legend: 1 - 2 | up to 3 | up to 4 | up to 5 | 5+

Labels: 4, 6% | 9, 13% | 34, 48% | 10, 14% | 13, 19%

Every Child Ready to Read Early Literacy Program

Questions 10 to 13 asked the responding public children's librarians about information, materials and use of the ALA/PLA early literacy initiative *Every Child Ready to Read.*

Figure 7 reports the results of the 107 participating respondents when asked if they had access to the *Every Child Ready to Read* materials. The results reported 73 children's librarians, or 68% had access to or were aware of the program, while 34 or 32% of the participating children's librarians were not aware of the program.

Results to question 11 showed 17 or 16% of the participating children's librarians were using the *Every Child Ready to Read* for the purposes for which it was designed: training sessions for parents, caregivers, and outreach programs, while 90 or 84% of the respondents were not using the program (Figure 8).

Figure 9 reports the ways in which the responding children's librarians changed their preschool storytimes to better address the six pre-reading skills identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy program. Many of the respondents commented that they were incorporating these pre-reading skills in their preschool storytimes long before the ALA/PLA early literacy initiative was presented.

Finally, question 13 asked respondents how successful they considered the *Every Child Ready to Read* program and the materials included with this early literacy program to be to them and to their audiences. Of the 107 participating public children's librarians, only 35 responded to this question. A total of 32 of the respondents had some level of success with the program, while 3 public children's librarians responded that the program was unsuccessful (Figure 10).

Figure 7
Public Librarians Access to *Every Child Ready to Read* Materials
n = 107

☐ No
34, 32%

☐ Yes
45, 42%

☐ Do Not Use
23, 21%

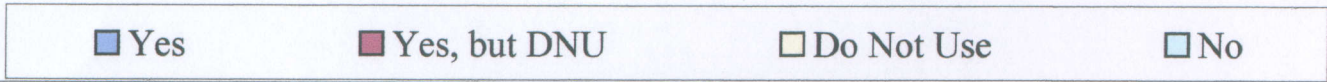☐ Yes, but DNU
5, 5%

| ■ Yes | ■ Yes, but DNU | ☐ Do Not Use | ☐ No |
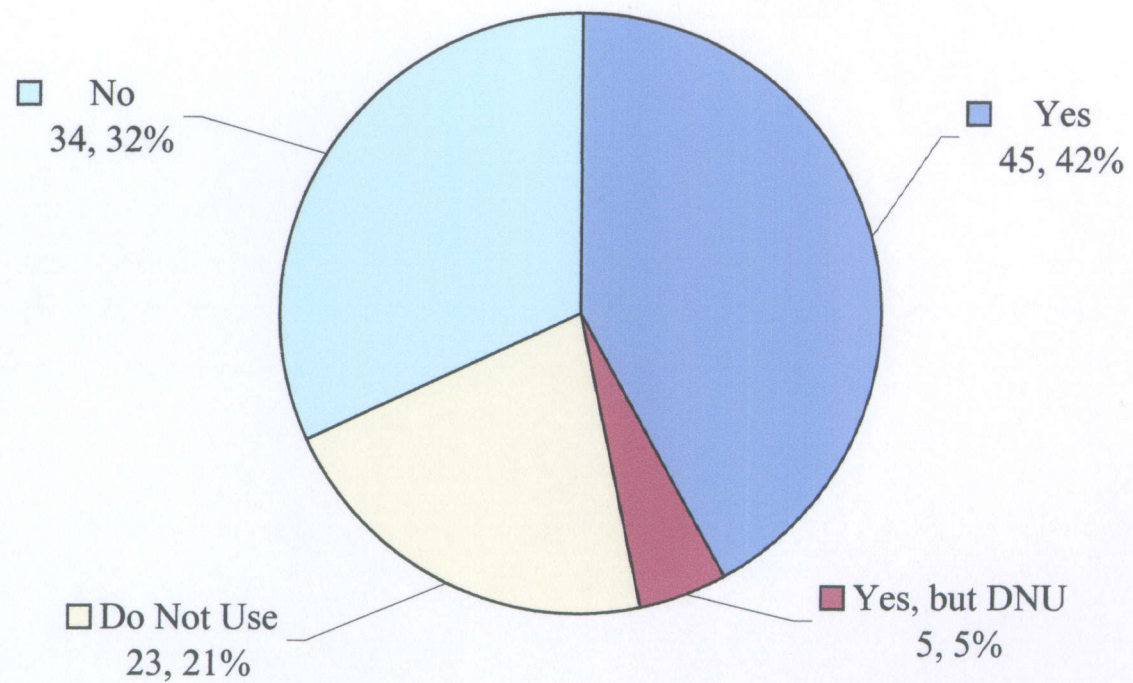
Figure 8
Are Public Librarians Using the *Every Child Ready to Read* Materials for Training Parents and Caregivers?

n = 107

17, 16%

90, 84%

☐ Yes   ☐ No
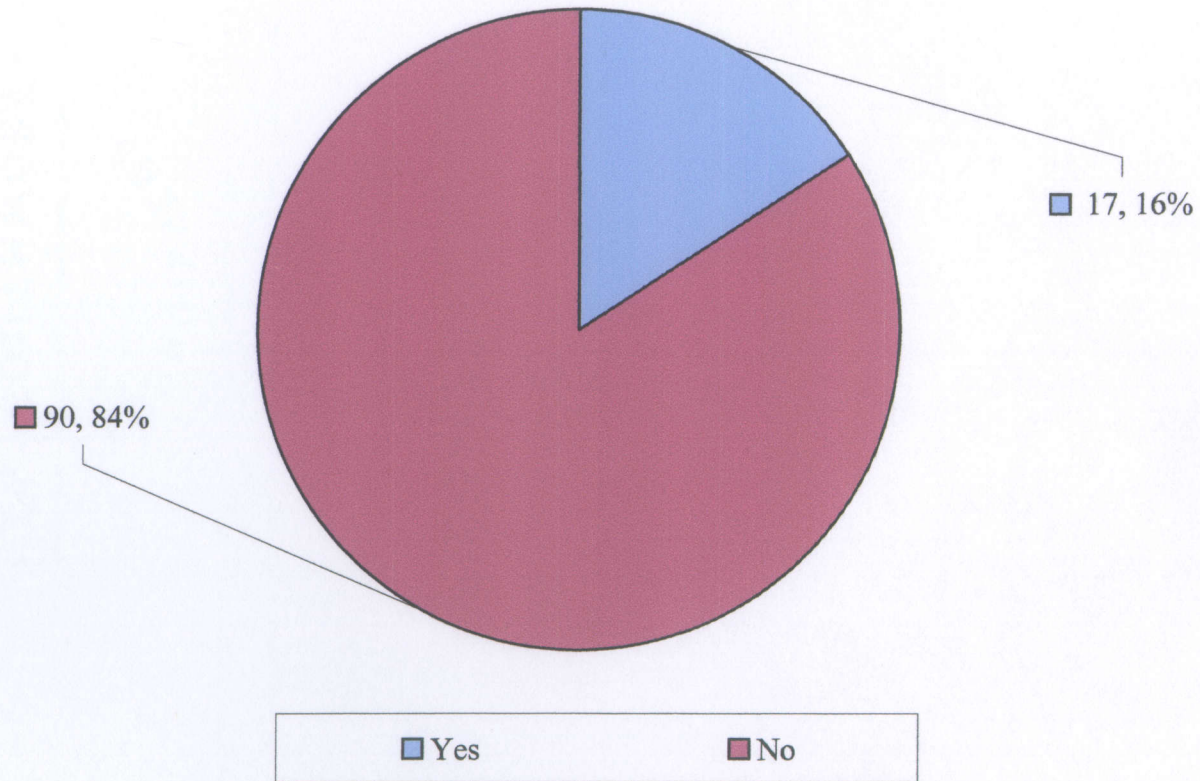
Figure 9
Changes Made to Public Library Preschool Storytimes
to Better Address the Six Pre-Reading Skills
n = 107

Legend:
- Parent/caregiver involvement during the storytime
- Tips for parents and caregivers for extending the early literacy learning at home
- Handouts of rhymes and finger plays
- Age appropriate reading lists
- Discussion with parents/caregivers
- Brochures for parents or caregivers
- Other: Please list

Bar values: 44, 26, 35, 37, 30, 20, 16
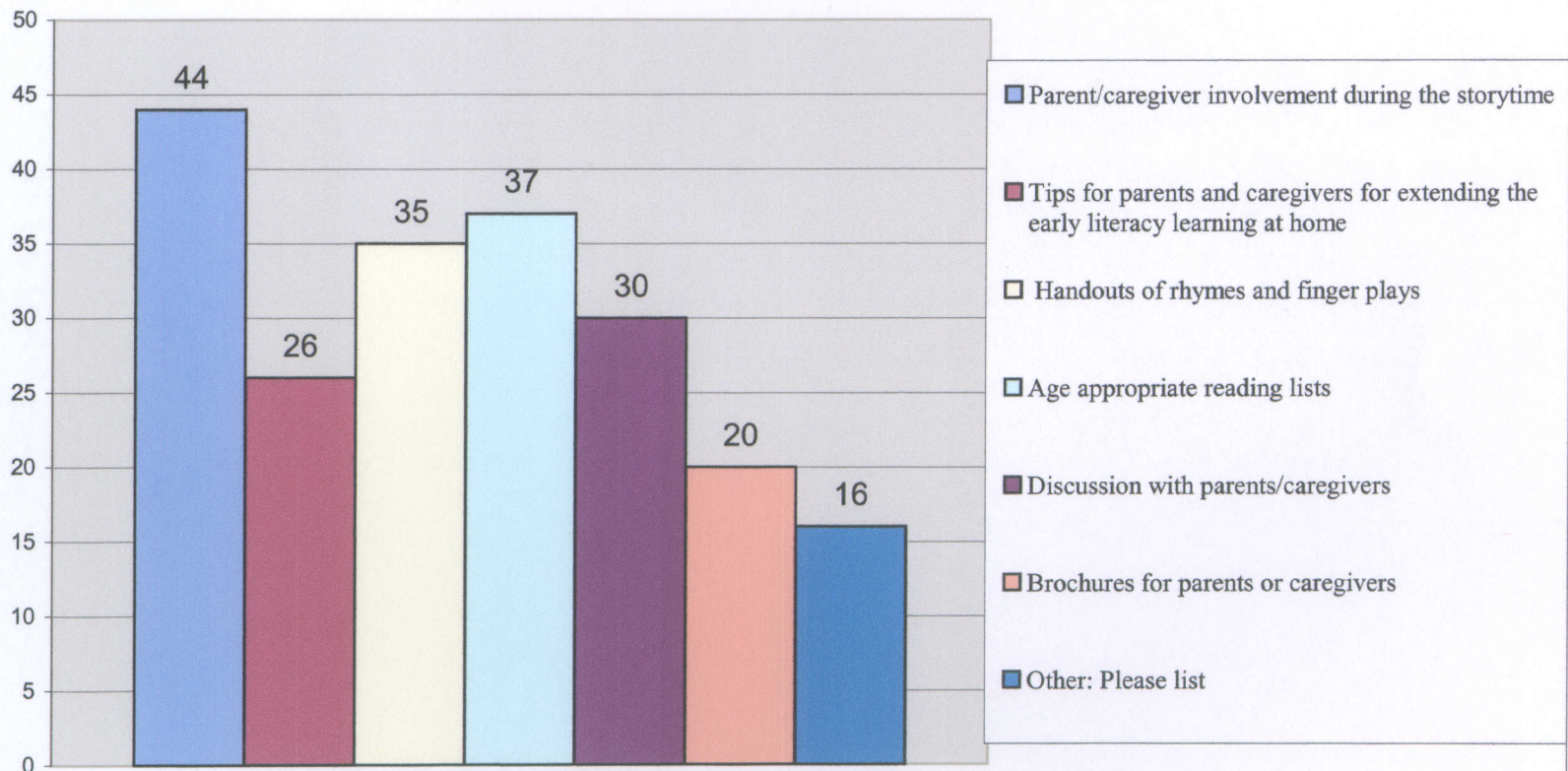
Figure 10
Success Rating by Public Librarians of the *Every Child Ready to Read* Program
n = 35

Legend:
- Very Successful
- Moderately Successful
- Successful
- Unsuccessful
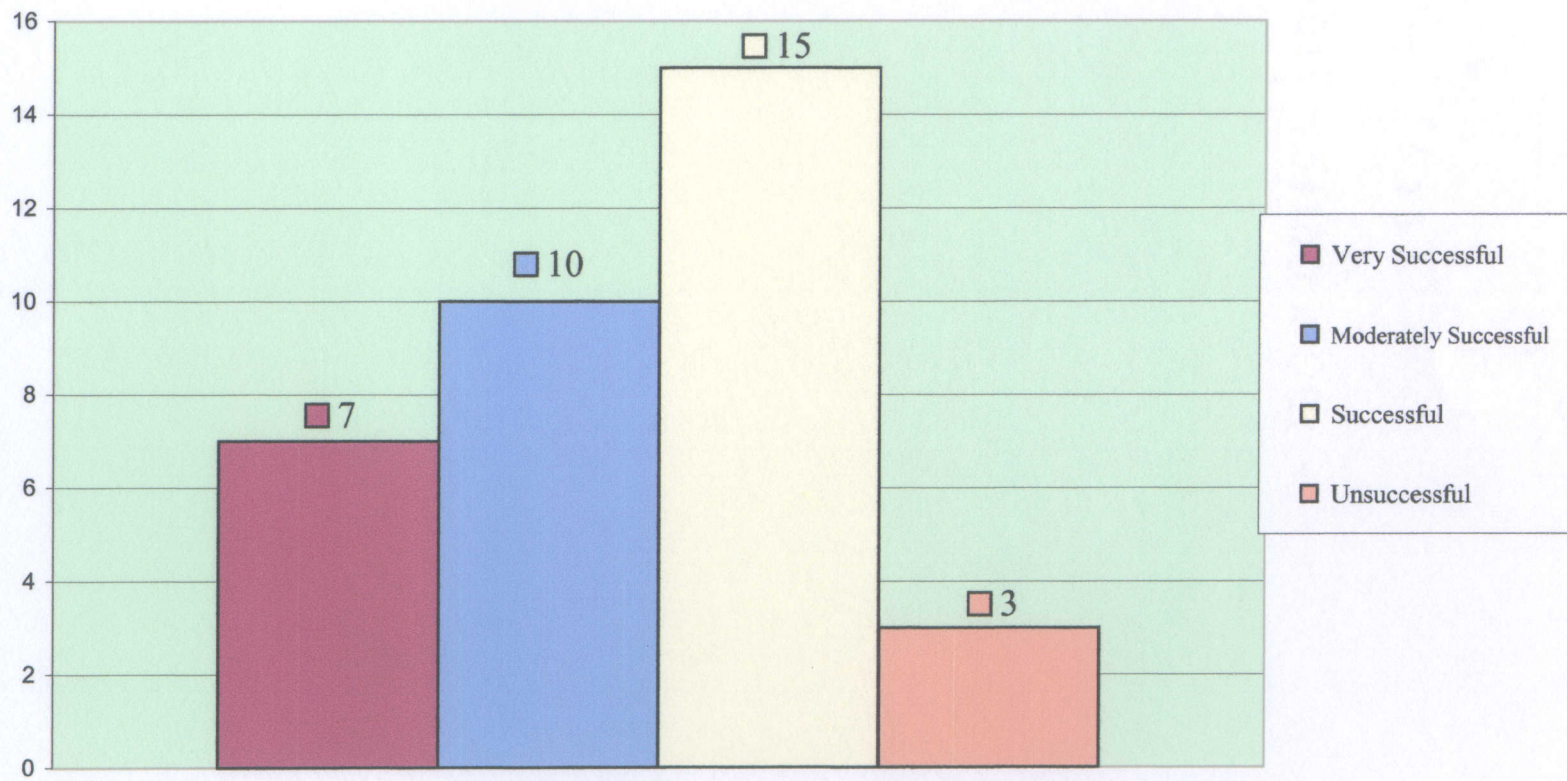
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Importance of Study

The results of this study showed that the responding children's librarians working in New Jersey public libraries were dedicated to promoting early literacy skills in their weekly preschool storytimes. These storytimes incorporated a wide variety of activities demonstrating the creativity and hard work public children's librarians do to prepare their preschool patrons to get ready to learn to read when they begin school.

Participating public children's librarians used a wide range of promotional methods to advertise their weekly preschool storytimes. Those most commonly used, as reported by participating public children's librarians, were publicizing their storytimes on the program calendar of their library homepage, press releases to local newspapers, and in-house posters and flyers.

New Jersey public librarians also helped promote early literacy skills to those preschool children in Head Start programs and local nursery schools by taking their storytimes to these sites, as well as inviting these classes to the library as class trips.

This study also showed that the ALA/PLA *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library* early literacy program is not yet a success with responding New Jersey public children's librarians.

Conclusions

Positive results of this study concluded that New Jersey public children's librarians typically offer 5 to 6 weekly preschool storytimes for at least 50 preschool children lasting from 30 minutes to one hour. The majority of these storytimes included the use of storybooks, music and a craft.

New Jersey public children's librarians also demonstrated an amazing variety of activities in their preschool storytimes to promote the six pre-reading skills identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy program as necessary for children to enter school ready to learn to read and write.

Public children's librarians were also providing these preschool storytimes for the three age groups identified by *Every Child Ready to Read*: "Early Talkers": birth to two-years old, "Talkers": two- and three-year olds, and "Pre-Readers": four- and five-year olds.

Promotion and advertisement for these preschool storytimes was mostly in-house; by means of posters, flyers, newsletters and the program calendar on their library homepage.

Negative results of this study showed that the *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library* early literacy program is not yet a success with public children's librarians in New Jersey.

Some public children's librarians did not accept the role of "trainer" as described in the purpose of this program. However, those public children's librarians who did use the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy program found it successful.

When asked how the participating public children's librarians had changed their

preschool storytimes to better address the six pre-reading skills identified by the research, most respondents answered that there had been little or no change in their preschool programs given that they were already doing the suggested activities in their preschool storytimes without using the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy program. However, those same respondents did not specifically include the demonstrations and training sessions for parents and caregivers.

Possible Uses of Results

The goal of the *Every Child Ready to Read@ Your Library* program is for public children's librarians to demonstrate to those adults working with preschool children from birth to age 5 ways to promote early, or developmental literacy skills in their daily lives in order to help their children be ready to learn when they begin school. The program was not designed to teach children how to read; rather it teaches parents, caregivers, public children's librarians and adults who work with preschool age children how to prepare their children to get ready to learn when they begin formal schooling.

Research in the area of early literacy has proven that public children's librarians are a positive source for promoting early literacy skills and play a significant role in developing those skills through the use of preschool storytimes. These positive experiences for preschool children help promote a love for books, a curiosity about their world, leading to lifelong learners.

An increase in state sponsored training sessions for public children's librarians could increase the confidence needed by New Jersey public children's librarians to accept this added role as a trainer or demonstrator to parents and caregivers. *Every Child Ready*

to Read materials might be expanded to offer examples for public children's librarians to relate specific books to pre-reading skill related activities when demonstrating those skills to parents and caregivers. Updated bibliographies are also needed so public children's librarians can use new materials in the suggested training sessions and in their preschool storytimes.

Partnering with another public librarian who has had success with the *Every Child Ready to Read* parent/caregiver demonstrations would be another option for increasing the use and success of this early literacy program by New Jersey public children's librarians.

Recommendations for Further Study

Public children's librarians in New Jersey are a dynamic and hard working group of professionals dedicated to preparing storytimes to promote early literacy skills as shown by the responses to this study.

A better response rate might have presented a more positive picture of the use of the *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library* early literacy program by New Jersey public children's librarians. However, further study is needed to determine specific reasons why *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library* is not being used as a complete program for promoting early literacy in New Jersey public libraries, especially since New Jersey public children's librarians were already promoting the six pre-reading skills necessary for the three specified age groups to enter school ready to learn to read and write.

Training sessions for public children's librarians for each of the three age groups identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library* program are ongoing in public library systems in 13 states across the Unites States. These public and state library systems are sponsoring full and half-day training sessions for public children's librarians and staff members to have hands-on, interactive experiences with the *Every Child Ready to Read* materials and program goals. These sessions are training the "trainer" to evaluate, customize and adapt the materials to suit their needs and the needs of their audiences (ALA, 2005).

New Jersey public children's librarians have to recognize the importance of "parent education programs in the preschool period...suggesting that parents are the first and most essential teachers" (Boyer, 1991, p. 55). This means providing ways for these talented professionals to accept the role of "trainer" and present early literacy demonstrations, with age-appropriate skill development methods and materials, to the parents and caregivers of their young patrons.

The children's librarians working in New Jersey public libraries are addressing the early literacy needs their young patrons and using imaginative and meaningful ways to increase pre-reading skills; thereby enabling those children to get ready to learn. What is needed now is the above mentioned parent, caregiver training sessions so those early literacy skills can continue to develop in the child's home setting.

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APPENDIX A

Cover Letter for Questionnaire

APPENDIX A

Cover Letter for Questionnaire

Dear (Insert name)   Children's or Youth Services Librarian,

        This survey is to be completed by the children's librarian or the librarian most
knowledgeable about services for preschool children in your library. Please respond
for services and resources provided for preschool children as your library defines them.
This survey should only take approximately 15 minutes.

        As a graduate student in the school of Public Librarianship at Rowan University,
I am conducting a research project as part of my Master's thesis under the supervision
of Dr. Marilyn Shontz. The purpose of this research is to study the extent to which public
librarians and public libraries in New Jersey are promoting early literacy through preschool
storytimes; defined in this paper as those storytimes designed for children from birth to age
five. This research also hopes to determine the awareness and use of the *Every Child Ready
to Read @ Your Library* early literacy incentive by public librarians in New Jersey, which
addresses the following six pre-reading skills: print motivation, print awareness,
vocabulary, letter knowledge, narrative skills, and phonological awareness

        Surveys are being sent to public libraries throughout the state; participation in this
survey is strictly voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.
Please add any additional comments that you feel would help answer any of the questions or
define your response. A self-addressed stamped envelope is included for your survey return.
You may request a copy of the results by including your e-mail address at the end of the
survey.
        Any questions you have concerning this research project may be directed to
Dr. Marilyn Shontz at   shontz@rowan.edu.

        Please contact me if you have any questions at   kathi_kelley@yahoo.com.

        Thank you in advance for assisting me with this research.

                                                                        Sincerely,

                                                                        Kathleen M. Kelley

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

APPENDIX B

Public Librarians Questionnaire

New Jersey Public Librarians and Early Literacy Skills

1. What is the number of preschool storytimes offered by your library in an average week?

Please circle one of the following:

a. 5 or less preschool storytimes

b. 6 to 10 preschool storytimes

c. More than 10 preschool storytimes

2. Please check all of the following activities that you incorporate in any of your preschool storytimes:

_____Opening exercise   _____Storybook reading   _____Finger play

_____Storytelling   _____Arts and crafts   _____Nursery rhyme

_____Music and songs   _____Role playing   _____Computer activities

_____Special programs (i.e., puppet shows)

Other (Please list):_____

_____

3. In an average week, how many children attend the preschool storytimes at your library?

Please circle one of the following:

a. Less than 50

b. 51 to 100

c. 101 to 200

d. More than 200

4. What is the average length of the preschool storytimes at your library?

Please circle one of the following:

a. Less than 30 minutes

b. 30 minutes to 1 hour

c. More than 1 hour

5. How do you advertise the preschool storytimes offered by your library?

Please circle all that apply.

a. In-house posters, flyers and/or brochures

b. Newsletters

c. Press releases to local newspapers

d. Program calendar on your library homepage

Other: Please list_____

_____

6. Do community Head Start and local nursery school classes visit your library as a class

trip rather than as a part of your scheduled preschool storytimes?

_____Yes   _____No

If **Yes**, how many classes visit your library in one month_____

7. Does your library offer any outreach preschool storytimes to Head Start programs

and local nursery schools? (Do you take the storytime programs to the children at

another site?).

_____Yes   _____No   If **No**, skip to **question 10**.

8. How often, during any one month, does your library provide outreach preschool

storytimes?

Please circle one of the following:

a. 5 or less preschool storytimes

b. 6 to 10 preschool storytimes

c. More than 10 preschool storytimes

9. Are these outreach preschool storytimes usually the same programs as those offered to the children who attend the scheduled preschool storytimes at your library?

_____Yes   _____No

Comments:_____

_____

Please respond to the following questions based on the preschool storytimes offered by your library.

10. Do you, the children's librarian, have access to the information and materials included in the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy kit?

_____Yes   _____No   _____Do not use

11. Are you, the children's librarian, using the materials developed for the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy initiative for the purposes for which they were designed? (Training sessions for parents and caregivers, outreach programs, etc.)

_____Yes   _____No

12. In what ways, if any, have you, the children's librarian, changed your preschool storytimes to better address the six pre-reading skills identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy initiative? Please check all of the following that apply to you and your library:

_____Parent/caregiver involvement during the storytime

_____Tips for extending the early literacy learning at home

_____ Handouts of rhymes and finger plays

_____Age appropriate reading lists

_____Discussion with parents/caregivers

_____Brochures for parents or caregivers

Other: Please list_____

13. How successful do you, the children's librarian, consider the *Every Child Ready to Read* program and materials to be for you and your audiences?

_____ Very Successful

_____ Moderately Successful

_____ Successful

_____ Unsuccessful

Comments:_____

_____

Thank you for your assistance. Please add an email address if you would like a copy of the results.

Email address:_____

APPENDIX C

Comments from Survey Question 10

APPENDIX C

Question 10

Do you, the children's librarian, have access to the information and materials included in the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy kit?

- "Yes" have access to the materials/ but "do not use" them.

- Not yet, training is in March.

- Programming is due to start this spring. We had hoped to start in Jan., 2006, but for a number of reasons had to postpone.

- Our library has a separate Family Literacy department and staff.

- Not at this time.

- I have seen it and don't like it

- My programs are chocked full of activities for developing literacy skills, I don't need a program guide.

- This program totally ignores the importance the listening skills so necessary for early literacy development.

- The videos are so boring.

APPENDIX D

Comments from Survey Question 11

APPENDIX D

Question 11

Are you, the children's librarian, using the materials developed for the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy initiative for the purposes for which they were designed? (Training sessions for parents and caregivers, outreach programs, etc.)

- Plan to offer sessions in the Spring.

- Have not yet implemented.

- I have never used these materials. I usually deal with teachers who may or may not provide the above information.

- Not at this time.

- We are beginning the program next month (March).

- Our staff does not like the materials that this program provides. We do our own early literacy skill development within our preschool storytimes.

- I don't have time to train or demonstrate for parents the children are my main focus.

- If we were provided with "real" training, maybe we would be more willing to try to present this program to the parents. We provide our parents with book lists and activities to take home – most of these materials are left behind.

APPENDIX E

Comments from Survey Question 12

APPENDIX E

Question 12

In what ways have you, the children's librarian, changed your weekly preschool storytimes to better address the six pre-reading skills identified by the *Every Child Ready to Read* early literacy initiative?

- We rewrote our program descriptions to point out what skills/benefits children will receive/learn from each program.

- The *Every Child Ready to Read* program to begin after March staff training.

- Our storytimes have become more interactive since incorporating some of the *Every Child Ready to Read* ideas.

- I have seen demonstrations of this program at conferences, but have not yet had the staff or time to incorporate it into our storytimes.

- I have done this before, and if the future will be giving "Tips for parents and Caregivers for extending early literacy learning at home"; give more written materials to parents and Nannies.

- No real changes to what we've always done.

- Most of these activities are already incorporated into our programming.

- In January, February, and March we are providing separate storytimes to introduce pre-reading skills to parents. We hope to fully incorporate this into our normal programming.

APPENDIX F

Comments from Survey Question 13

APPENDIX F

Question 13

How successful do you, the children's librarian, consider the *Every Child Ready to Read* program and materials to be for you and your audiences?

- Very Successful................7
- Moderately Successful....10
- Successful........................15
- Unsuccessful.....................3