

December, 2011

By Janet Ingraham Dwyer, Youth Services Library Consultant
State Library of Ohio

Read. Write. Sing. Talk. Play. These five simple practices help parents and caregivers nurture their young children's pre-reading skills and get them ready to succeed in kindergarten. Children's librarians are ideally situated to share early literacy skills with parents and caregivers in their communities. They know children's literature, and they know a myriad of ways to engage children through story, rhyme, and song. They work in organizations that are free and open to all, and that keep longer hours than daycares and social service agencies. They are invested in their communities and care deeply about children and literacy. Thanks to the efforts of their children's librarians and library workers, Ohio's public libraries truly enhance kindergarten readiness. And the need remains great.

According to Ohio's School Readiness Solutions Group's July 2007 report "Giving Children a Chance: Strategies for Implementing Ohio's School Readiness Agenda", nearly one third of Ohio's 130,000 kindergartners arrived on their first day of school not prepared to succeed as learners. [A recent nationwide survey by Age of Learning, Inc.](#) "reveals that America's kindergarten teachers believe most young children are unprepared for school when they enter kindergarten, and veteran kindergarten teachers believe that this situation is deteriorating." And a [stunning recent article by Jonathan Cohn](#) describes advances in the study of child development which conclude that the first two years of life are enormously important, and that neglect during that time causes irreversible neurological damage.

Public libraries support at-risk children by working with parents, caregivers, extended family, Head Start programs, daycares, and other agencies invested in the success of young children. A little education and encouragement – simple early literacy practices, a library card, and the affirmation that parent and child are welcome in the library – seem like small things, but can offer tremendous long-term benefits for children, families and communities.

[Ohio Ready to Read](#) (ORTR) is an ongoing statewide initiative created to help address the early literacy needs of Ohio's children. It is a partnership of the Ohio Library Council (OLC) and the State Library of Ohio, and is managed by a task force of the OLC Children's Services Division. Its original goals, set in 2007 and still pertinent, were to inform, educate, and support – to inform library directors, trustees, and children's staff about the importance of early literacy and their role in promoting early literacy, and to inform local and state agencies that libraries have the resources and expertise to be strong partners; to educate library staff in early literacy skills that they could then teach to parents and caregivers; and to support libraries and other agencies in their early literacy work.

Ohio Ready to Read



ORTR enjoyed a robust, energetic initial period of activity during which hundreds of children's services specialists around Ohio were trained in the use of Every Child Ready to Read® @ Your Library® (ECRR), a parent outreach education curriculum developed by the Public Library Association (PLA) and Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC). Librarians learned about the six early literacy skills – Print Awareness, Letter Knowledge, Vocabulary, Print Motivation, Phonological Awareness, and Narrative Skills – how they impact a child's neurological development and future school success, and how to train parents in nurturing these skills. A network of eighteen Regional Coordinators was established to coordinate trainings around the state. Librarians trained in ECRR through the statewide workshops were certified to provide "Fun and Facts of Storytime" training to child care workers for Step Up To Quality credit. An [ORTR website](#) and [wiki](#) were developed to facilitate the sharing of ideas and resources among Ohio's librarians.



The project was strong, inspiring, and effective – and then state budget cuts in mid-2009 brought just about all statewide ORTR-related activity to a halt. As libraries, ever resilient, figured out how to maintain their missions under reduced state funding, ORTR also took steps to reaffirm its support of and advocacy for early literacy services. In addition to the ongoing need to reach and educate adults who care for at-risk children, and the heightened urgency brought on by cuts to social service agencies, ORTR was also galvanized by the announcement by PLA and ALSC that a thoroughly revised ECRR toolkit would soon be published.

The new toolkit, released in June 2011, retained the goal of parent education to benefit children aged 0-5, but exchanged the emphasis on the six early literacy skills for an emphasis on five practices that adults and children can do to develop these skills: reading, writing, playing, talking, and singing. To help with this transition, ORTR sought an LSTA grant, administered by the State Library of Ohio, to provide a [round of workshops](#) to introduce the ECRR revision, and to help librarians assess their options and identify available resources.

Early literacy consultant Saroj Ghoting, well-known to Ohio librarians for her previous ECRR trainings and her widely-used book, *Early Literacy Storytimes*, developed a workshop called "STAR POWER™: Sing Talk And Read Play On and Write for Easier Reading™--Putting Every Child Ready to Read® 2nd ed. into Practice". Saroj presented the workshop five times in August 2011. 297 library workers attended the workshops, which were hosted by the Wood County District Public Library, Akron-Summit County Public Library, Dayton Metro Library, Chillicothe and Ross County Public Library, and Guernsey County District Public Library. ORTR representatives also spoke at each workshop to demonstrate library programs that highlight the Five Practices, and to showcase ORTR resources available to all libraries.

Among the resources shared at these workshops were several ongoing, new, and newly revised projects that are available to all Ohio public libraries and library staff:

- Ongoing availability of ORTR trainers to come to your library to present the [Fun and Facts of Storytime workshop](#) for your staff (and staff of neighboring libraries and/or child care agencies if you wish).
- Ongoing availability of lendable, traveling [ORTR Kits](#) to facilitate your community workshops and other early literacy programming.
- Redesigned and expanded [ORTR website](#) including new resources on advocacy, grants, and partnership building. Redesigned and expanded [ORTR wiki](#) to share and borrow early literacy



storytime outlines, booklists, programming and publicity ideas, and other resources developed by librarians.

- New [Grab and Go Literacy Station templates](#) to help you create displays anywhere in the library or community.

The ORTR task force is working on other new projects to help libraries navigate and use the original and revised ECRR materials, train new staff in early literacy concepts, and continue their important work of sharing their resources and expertise with parents, caregivers, children, early-childhood professionals, and the entire community.

The newest offering is an [Ohio Early Literacy Crosswalk](#) to help librarians and early-childhood professionals understand how four early literacy frameworks – the original ECRR, the revised ECRR, Ohio Department of Education Pre-K Content Standards, and Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework Outcomes – relate to one another. ORTR hopes and expects that this will be a valuable tool for children’s librarians in several ways:

- By sharing conceptual and practical ideas on how the original and revised ECRR materials interrelate and can be used in tandem.
- By introducing librarians to the Pre-K content standards and Head Start outcomes if they are not familiar.
- By relating ECRR concepts to the Pre-K content standards and the Head Start outcomes, to help librarians share ECRR concepts in ways that are meaningful to other early-childhood professionals.
- By facilitating access to CE/professional development credit for librarian-led ECRR-based workshops offered to early-childhood professionals.

The ORTR task force welcomes feedback on the Ohio Early Literacy Crosswalk, and on all its services and resources. You may contact task force chair Krista Tokarz (KTOKARZ@cuyahogalibrary.org) or State Library youth services consultant Janet Ingraham Dwyer (jdwyer@library.ohio.gov) to share your thoughts, ideas, or suggestions.

Ohio Ready to Read succeeds in its mission to help address the early literacy needs of Ohio’s children only through the efforts of children’s services librarians and library workers in public libraries across Ohio. Special thanks to all those who have committed time and energy to the success of ORTR since its inception, including the original ORTR committee, regional trainers, ORTR task force, Lynda Murray (OLC), Ruth Metcalf (State Library, retired), Kim Fender (Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County), Carol Mitchell (formerly of Greene County Public Library), Kathy Shahbodaghi (Columbus Metropolitan Library), and the OLC Children’s Services Division.

The ORTR task force also recognizes Justin Isaac, who redesigned and thoroughly updated the ORTR website and wiki, and Victoria Windsor, who researched, designed, and created the Ohio Early Literacy Crosswalk. Justin’s and Victoria’s participation was made possible through Kent State University School of Library and Information Science Master’s Practicum assignments at the State Library of Ohio. They each produced excellent, lasting work to benefit ORTR and children’s services librarians around Ohio.

Current members of the ORTR task force include:

Krista Tokarz, Chair, Cuyahoga County Public Library
Elaine Betting, Lorain Public Library System
Natalie Fields, Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County
Marisa Glaviano, Westerville Public Library
Janet Ingraham Dwyer, State Library of Ohio