Transforming Preschool Storytime
ALA Neal-Schuman purchases fund advocacy, awareness, and accreditation programs for library professionals worldwide.
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To my parents for the first 34 and to Chris for the 35th
—Melanie

To the most creative, hard-working, fun-loving, and dedicated team of all—
the Education Department of Port Discovery Children’s Museum
—Betsy
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While I was the children’s programming specialist at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, some of my colleagues questioned if it was time to rethink the traditional structure of preschool storytime. Given that children learn best through repetition, the best way to forge new connections in the brain is by building on something already learned. Since a child who loves a book will listen to it repeatedly without getting bored, we reasoned that incorporating the same book into multiple storytimes would enhance learning. In fact, since repetition with variety expands an experience, if the same book was used in different ways for a succession of storytimes, the experience with that particular book could become much richer than it might if the book was read aloud only once. The question became “Would using repetition with variety help increase the school readiness and reading readiness skills of preschoolers in Baltimore?”

This theory of repetition with variety made sense, and I began looking for ways to use books repetitively but creatively in preschool storytimes. Repeating a book in different, fun ways shows children that reading is fun, which builds print motivation. As children understand the meaning of a story, connections are made between concepts and the words describing them, increasing vocabulary and enhancing comprehension. Paying attention to printed words increases concepts of print (also called print awareness). Exploring their connection with a story helps children learn the nuances of language and life experiences. Examining illustrations in a story’s context increases comprehension while enhancing visual awareness. Dialectic reading or taking a story walk (asking questions about the story, giving children time to form thoughts and the opportunity to
respond) allows children to expand their comprehension while developing and improving communication skills. Reciting poetry or reading rhyming texts that end with the same sounds heighten phonological awareness and sensitivity. Playing with words by singing them, engaging in call-and-response games, using intonation during fingerplays (funny voices for funny words, LOUD voices for LOUD words, and soft voices for soft words), and inviting children to chime in during repeated story phrases or rhyming parts also reinforce vocabulary and comprehension. Playing games with stories that involve interaction with other children introduces social skills; following directions helps build self-regulation skills. These skills all set the scene for reading success and increase the likelihood of school completion.

Of course, it would be impossible to incorporate all of these activities in relation to one particular book read during just one storytime session. Using the same storytime book repeatedly over the course of a few weeks, though, could emphasize the development of different skills each time. Therefore, wouldn’t preschool storytime best serve its clients as a purposeful learning experience if repetition rather than themes became the basis for planning programs? Or—for those librarians who prefer themes when planning their programs—if themes were incorporated into the repetition, with the main emphasis being on new ways to present the repeated book?

Melanie, also a former children’s librarian at Pratt, joined me in the quest to discover answers to these questions and find out more about repetition, variety, and themes in preschool storytimes. While there is a large amount of professional library literature on preschool storytimes based on themes or lessons, there is not much on using the same book numerous times while presenting it in different ways. Librarians who have tried to incorporate repetition of specific books in their preschool storytimes have found it difficult. Questions have arisen regarding the amount of times a book should be repeated, what exactly constitutes “new ways of using the book,” and how librarians who enjoy using themes can continue to do so. Parents accustomed to different books being presented at every preschool storytime have questioned why one particular book is repeated from session to session.

Melanie and I have both presented preschool storytimes that use repetition with variety. Because of our personal experiences as well as the theoretical background, we wanted to share our findings with other librarians. This book hopes to answer many questions while helping librarians, child care providers and parents to plan transformed preschool storytimes.

**The Purpose of This Book**

This book provides the rationale for repetition with variety. Within its pages you will find explanations, outlines, examples, and templates all designed to make it easy for librarians to experiment with repetition in preschool storytime. Taking brain research, domains
of school readiness, multiple intelligences, constructivism, and best practices for early literacy into mind, it encourages rethinking the traditional preschool storytime model.

Transforming Preschool Storytime is based on the premise that children learn best through repetition. Children enjoy hearing the same beloved books read aloud repeatedly, and repetition with variety not only expands an experience but enhances brain development as well. Presenting the book in different ways enables the experiences to develop and strengthen a variety of skills. For instance, programs that involve following directions and taking turns help strengthen self-regulation skills. Singing and playing are also essential for the development of early literacy skills: singing builds vocabulary, and playing involves interacting socially with others. Science, math, and art activities can be woven into the presentation of a book in ways that make the story richer while also broadening children’s horizons. Life skills such as empathy, persistence, and being able to put oneself in another person’s shoes can also be tied into activities.

Scope of the Book

Transforming Preschool Storytime is a manual for using repetition creatively in preschool storytimes. With sample sessions, book and activity recommendations, resource lists, and extension suggestions, this book serves as a guide for librarians who are interested in expanding their repertoire and transforming their storytimes.

Part 1 contains background information on preschool storytime, along with an explanation of ways that traditional preschool storytimes can be transformed. Information about early literacy and school readiness, multiple intelligences, life skills, and constructivism are supplemented with theories supporting repetition with variety. Detailed explanations of both theory and research are presented in plain English, including practical real-world examples that will help explain changes to parents and administrators. Two researchers—Klaus Libertus of the Kennedy Krieger Institute and Melissa Libertus of Johns Hopkins University—share their research findings on how children learn. Finally, part 1 includes “The Nitty Gritty,” a chapter containing specific details regarding planning and presenting successful preschool storytimes. It includes a planning template, a list of resources, information about keeping records, ways to modify programs based on personal style, and tips for presenting preschool storytime including the use of big books, puppets, nonfiction, and poetry.

Part 2 provides planning aids to make your job easier with outlines of storytime sessions that can be used as fill-in-the-blank planning sheets. It also includes scripts to facilitate an easy transformation from traditional preschool storytime to ones where the same book is repeated in different ways. There are also booklists and questions for evaluation. Most important, we highlight eight selected books that are proven preschool storytime favorites. Two scripts are complete, with lyrics to all fingerplays, titles of books to be used, and simply stated directions. Repeated materials are clearly marked; suggestions
for alternative activities and lists of other recommended books are also given. In a series of six consecutive storytime sessions in later scripts, selected books are paired with activities that touch on different skills.

**Chapter-by-Chapter Organization and Different Ways the Book Might Be Used**

Supplying background information about preschool storytime, summaries of learning theories, and current research provides an explanation to librarians who have taken on the challenge of this new way of planning rather than continuing to present the same type of storytime they have been doing for years. It also provides a reasonable response for librarians to give to parents who ask, “Why are you reading that same book again?” by explaining the value of repeating a book with variation.

The first two scripts in part 2 of this book can be used word for word. Ideas for the following six books (with six sessions each) are presented as part of a script; librarians can “fill in the blanks” with books and activities of their choosing. Together, these chapters provide a full year’s worth of preschool storytimes.

These outlines are simply a guide suggesting different ways the selected books can be used; it is fine for readers to come up with their own ideas. Lists of alternative activities, media, and books provide substitute items for scripts, yet even these are replaceable. This guide is meant to make programming with repetition using variety easy and fun. Thus, this book intends to show by example how to create transformed storytimes and to build knowledgeable librarians who feel confident creating these new kinds of storytime on their own.

Developmental tips provide informal asides that librarians can use to explain the value of an activity to parents, to suggest ways to replicate or create similar activities at home, to reinforce the message that a parent is a child’s first and best teacher, and to familiarize parents with the different domains of school readiness and the importance of life skills.

The end result, then, is a guidebook to help librarians easily transition into using a selected book repeatedly in numerous storytimes, through fun activities that inspire imagination, encourage creativity, and help children to exercise problem-solving skills.
There are many people who need to be thanked for their role in the creation of this book. Our colleagues at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore provided many wonderful ideas. Special thanks go to Selma Levi for her incredible knowledge of books and to Gloria Bartas for her endless supply of creative ways to present books. Kit Bloom, Carolyn Harnick, and Caitlin Huddleston also shared some favorite books and implementation ideas. Other helpful, creative librarians include Nancy Feierstein, Lori Guenthner, Summer Rosswog, and Dorothy Stoltz. Marisa Conner, from the Baltimore County Public Library, showed me the Read, Play, and Learn curriculum, which extends the theory of learning through repetition of chosen picture books in a wide variety of ways that touch upon different senses. It has become a great resource and provides validation for the theory of repetition with variety. Michele Presley enthusiastically shared many creative ideas and provided examples for the story signs in chapter 10 (“Series 8: The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything”). Thank you to my fellow librarian Regina Wade who shared wonderful playful activities that have been incorporated in this book!

The Education Department at Port Discovery Children’s Museum in Baltimore has been an invaluable resource; each staff member is a hard-working, thoughtful, fun-loving, and creative person, dedicated to helping children become the best they can be while encouraging learning through play. We’ve had many stimulating discussions and together have designed programs that include books, drama, art, music, STEM, and much more. Jennifer Bergantz, Sarah Draude, Daveed Korup, and Nora Moynihan all
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I would also like to thank the ladies who sat next to me on a plane ride coming back from a Mother Goose on the Loose workshop; they asked what I was writing and began offering suggestions once the subject matter was described! Fran Glushakow supplied Friday-night dinner for weeks as the deadline for the manuscript was getting closer; Shira Glushakow-Smith and Elinor Naor helped with technical details. Thank you to Stuart, who lovingly brought me many cups of tea and gave plenty of moral support!

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And thank you to Melanie, a terrific librarian, who agreed to write this book with me!

—I betsy

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And finally, to Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen for inviting me into this project. Your support and faith in me throughout this process has been amazing—thank you!

—Melanie
PART I

Preschool Storytime, Learning Theories, Research, and Practical Applications
What Is Preschool Storytime?

Preschool storytime is generally a thirty-minute program offered in a public library for children ages 3 to 5. A librarian, staff person, or volunteer reads several picture books aloud, using props and activities between books to keep children attentive. There are variations on this; some libraries extend the thirty-minute program and offer crafts or films as part of the preschool storytime. Others offer a family-based storytime that includes a larger age range. However, this book will refer to preschool storytime as the thirty-minute picture book–based program geared for children from ages 3 to 5.

The first programs for children in public libraries were geared toward school-age children. In the 1930s, they were expanded to include programs for preschoolers. Today, a significant responsibility for most children's librarians is programming for children of all ages, which often includes planning and presenting lap-sit programs for caregivers with babies and toddlers, picture book–based storytimes for preschoolers, extended-book programs for early elementary children, and booktalk programs for school-age children.

When presented enthusiastically, good books can hold any audience spellbound. Although a program may be aimed at one specific age group, it is not unusual to have a few older or younger siblings attend. Family storytimes are planned to appeal to everyone, despite varying ages. Through hearing stories read aloud from books, children are exposed to new vocabulary and concepts. Presenting high-quality storybooks helps to develop critical thinking skills, and can instill a lifelong love of reading. It makes sense, then, that books are the basis of most public library programs for children, including preschool storytime.
The main goal of preschool storytime is to help children develop a positive connection with books and illustration, which will later translate into a positive attitude toward books in general. It gives them (and the parents or child care providers who attend) a chance to become familiar with the library, to feel as though it is their place. Additionally, a positive relationship with the person regularly presenting the storytime is fostered. Preschool storytime introduces children and their caregivers to a wide range of books with a variety of authors and illustrators, providing exposure to numerous vocabulary words and artistic techniques. It brings books and people together, hopefully inspiring program attendees to borrow books from the public library and look at them together at home. It creates a community of program attendees; children who do not attend preschool can interact with other children and adults. Preschool storytime becomes a place where adults who may feel isolated at home can socialize with other adults in the same situation. Book-reading behavior is modeled, and children are given the opportunity to learn how to become part of a group.

Benefits of Preschool Storytime

Specific areas related to school readiness (often referred to as domains of school readiness) are personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical and scientific thinking, approach to learning, cognition and general knowledge, physical development and health, and the arts.

SCHOOL READINESS DOMAINS

- **Personal and social development** includes emotional health; it involves self-confidence, caring for others, having trust in others, and self-regulation skills such as the ability to pay attention, follow directions, and show empathy.
- **Language and literacy** involves print motivation (liking books and thinking that reading is fun), vocabulary (knowing the names of things), print awareness (recognizing print and being familiar with the format of books), letter knowledge (knowing that letters have corresponding names and sounds), narrative skills (being able to tell stories or give descriptions), and phonological awareness (being able to hear the sounds in words).
- **Mathematical and scientific thinking** involves recognizing shapes and patterns, understanding sequences, forming hypotheses and testing them out, and recognizing cause and effect.
- **Approach to learning** is a positive attitude characterized by curiosity, the desire to learn, willingness to problem solve, and courage to try new things.
- **Cognition and general knowledge** refers to knowledge about the surrounding world. It includes a very basic understanding of social studies, geography, and the natural world.
Physical development and health includes both fine and gross motor development. It involves knowing the names for body parts and what they do.

The arts involves appreciating and using creative expression through fine art, music, and drama.

In an effort to help more children enter school ready to read, storytime planning sheets for librarians were developed by Elaine Czarnecki, a reading specialist from Johns Hopkins University. Since the purpose of the sheets was to help children develop skills that “kindergarten teachers expect children to be familiar with when they enter school,” librarians who were planning programs were asked to include developmentally appropriate, language-related activities for 3-to-5-year-old children that complemented the books being read aloud. These planning sheets gave librarians language and literacy goals to keep in mind when planning programs in order to promote age-appropriate school readiness skills.

In addition to language and literacy skills, activities and games that take place in preschool storytime can help develop a child’s social and emotional skills. Self-regulation is important in a classroom; children need to know how to think before they act, to express their emotions through words, to wait their turn, and to be sensitive to others. Preschool storytime can help children develop self-regulation skills through simple activities that require both interaction and patience. Inviting children to take turns coming up to the front of the room, performing a specific task, and then receiving applause from the group is one way to build up their sense of self-confidence. At the same time, the children doing the applauding are learning how to show appreciation to others. Research has found that improved self-regulation skills combined with a broad academic basis are most effective in helping children succeed in school.

LIFE SKILLS
Based on years of research on the changing workforce and the changing family, Ellen Galinsky, president and cofounder of the Families and Work Institute, compiled a list of seven essential life skills that children need.

Focus and self control include remembering rules, paying attention, and thinking flexibly. It is essential in today’s world where there is an overload of information and sensory stimulation.

Perspective taking is being able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. Being able to figure out what other people think and feel enables children to understand the intentions of the people around them. Whether they agree or disagree, children who can see things from another person’s perspective are less likely to get into conflicts.

Communication involves knowing your thoughts well enough to know precisely what you want to say, understanding people and situations well enough to determine how to communicate, and correctly assessing how others will interpret that communication.
Making connections between ideas is like a lightbulb going off in the brain. Creative thought is spurred by determining what is the same and what is different and then finding ways to connect them. This enables people to use information they already know.

Critical thinking is wondering about the world, forming questions, looking for obvious and alternative solutions, and discovering accurate answers. A solution that has been tried and determined to be reliable can then help guide beliefs, decisions, and actions.

Taking on challenges is a mind-set that involves embracing a problem and choosing to tackle it rather than ignore it. As a tool for managing stress, it is proactive rather than reactive.

Self-directed, engaged learning builds on a child’s already existing interests and desire to explore. Combining facts with experiences that are meaningful and purposeful results in an increased desire to learn and to grow based on what has been learned.

Read It Again!

In the late 1990s, scientific research demonstrated that the first three years of life are a crucial time for the formation of pathways in the brain that affect learning, behavior, and successful participation in adult society. Children’s librarians then began designing programs for infants and toddlers. Many of these early childhood library programs incorporate knowledge of how children learn by repeating songs, rhymes, and books on a weekly basis. Infants and toddlers respond with great enthusiasm to familiar rhyming activities as joyful learning takes place through repetition. Research on children’s learning strongly supports the importance not only of repetition, but of repetition with variation in learning situations. Dr. Klaus Libertus from Kennedy Krieger Institute and Dr. Melissa Libertus from Johns Hopkins University describe research findings below for this book:

At some point in our lives, all of us have experienced that learning something new is not easy. Learning requires practice, or put differently, learning requires repetition. This statement is fundamentally true and has been studied extensively by researchers across fields. For example, neurobiologists have uncovered how repetition shapes and enhances the connections between neurons in our central nervous system. We now know how learning works on a biological level. But in order to make things really stick, in order to facilitate learning and improve our memory, we do not just need repetition—we also need variation. Psychologists have shown that repetition with added variation in context or task demands can strongly enhance learning and memory. Indeed, several lines of research starting in early infancy and spanning the entire lifespan support the concept of learning through repetition with variation. Here, we offer a brief review of a few of these research findings in the domains of
visual perception, language, and motor skills learning to illustrate the value of repetition with variation in instruction and in game or play routines.

When an infant repeatedly observes the same event, this event will become boring and the infant will stop looking at it. Conversely, if something new or surprising happens, infants’ attention rebounds and they start to look for a longer time again. These looking preferences can be used to study what infants remember. Bomba and Siqueland7 made use of this technique and repeatedly showed 3-month-old infants a display where dots were arranged to form a shape such as a triangle. Following repeated exposure to one shape (e.g., a triangle), infants looked longer at a display of dots arranged in a different shape, but only if they had seen twelve different examples of the triangle shape before. Showing them just six different examples of the triangle repeatedly was not sufficient to facilitate learning in these infants.

In a study with 5-month-old infants, Needham, Dueker, and Lockhead8 looked at how infants learn about object categories. To do this, they showed the infants an ambiguous object that may consist of either one piece or two pieces (a box with a hose attached). Without any prior experience, most infants at this age think that the object is one big piece. However, when given prior exposure to three similar (but different) boxes alone, infants seem to learn a category “box” and are more likely to judge the box-hose display as being composed of two objects. Critically, for this learning to take place infants had to be exposed to three or more boxes that were similar but not identical to the box used on the test object. Neither exposure to only two similar boxes, nor exposure to three boxes that were identical to the test object facilitated infants’ learning in this case.

Similar benefits of repetition with variation have been found for learning a new motor skill in older children. Kerr and Booth9 gave 8- and 12-year-olds practice in
throwing a ball to hit a target either from a fixed distance of three feet or from variable distances. Children were subsequently tested in their ability to hit the target from three feet. Surprisingly, the children who practiced throwing the ball from variable distances were better at hitting the target than the children who had practiced from the exact same distance. Thus, varying the distance to the target proved to be better than practicing exactly the motor skill that was eventually tested.

Another domain in which repeated exposure to variable input has been found to be critical is the domain of language. For example, Gomez examined how infants and adults learn syntactic dependencies between words that are not next to each other (e.g., subject-verb agreement as in “the tree behind the house is green . . .”). To this end, infants and adults listened to an artificial language that had such rules embedded. Adults and 18-month-old infants were able to learn these rules better if they were exposed to 24 different sentences than when they were only exposed to two, six, or twelve different sentences. Again, this shows that variability is essential to learn the underlying structure—in this case of the linguistic input.

Together, these studies show that starting at a very young age, both repetition and variation seem to strongly facilitate learning and memory across a variety of contexts and ages. Most important, these studies show that repetition with variation is a very powerful learning mechanism that should be harnessed to teach young children, for example, to enhance preschool-aged children's literacy.

Previous research has shown that young children develop a better understanding of a story through re-reading the same story multiple times. But even more so, children's story comprehension increases through reading and active participation in the literary experience. For example, 4- to 6-year-old children who repeated each sentence that was read to them instead of only passively listening were significantly better at recalling the content of the story and its semantic content. Moreover, showed that frequent retelling of a story with guidance by an adult significantly improves story comprehension in kindergarten children. One particular area that seems to benefit immensely is the ability to correctly recall the sequence of events in a story, a task that is often very difficult for young children.

Very young children love picture books and often like to hear them read aloud over and over; parents often tire of a book well before their children. When favorite bedtime stories are read aloud, the most common response is “Read it again!” In recognition of this, some libraries have started issuing special library cards for children under the age of 5 or 6 that allow books to be borrowed for extended periods of time without charging overdue fines. Three weeks is often not long enough for a child to hear a favorite book. After children have heard a story read aloud a number of times, they know what is going to happen next. This ability to predict correctly builds their self-esteem, gives them a sense that they are smart, and boosts their confidence to tackle tough tasks. The extended circulation period allows adults to read a book again and again until the child is finally ready for some new reading material.
Rather than getting bored by hearing the same story multiple times, children enjoy being able to anticipate what will happen. In some cases, they memorize the entire story and then delight in being able to recite it word for word along with the reader. This makes sense; even adults learn easily through repetition.

When searching for songs on your car radio, which radio station do you prefer—the one that plays songs that you already know or one whose music is totally new to you? The Listen, Like, Learn approach developed by Barbara Cass-Beggs suggests that people like repetition; listening to something they already know stimulates their enjoyment of the piece and enables them to learn something new from it each time it is repeated. This assertion correlates with findings in brain research that learning is comprised of connections made within the brain. A single piece of information that is not repeated is eventually pruned away, but repeated activities create new experiences that build upon one another, increasing the synapses and the actual weight of the brain. In essence, “What fires together wires together.” Curiously, when children begin attending library preschool programs at around the age of 3, this emphasis on repetition disappears. But is that really a best practice?

**Constructivism**

Jean Piaget understood that children learn best through their experiences, and he called the ideas that children get from these personal experiences “constructivism.” Social constructivism is when learners discover principles, concepts, and facts for themselves by making sense of their own experiences. When trying to draw children’s attention to paintings in museums, instead of using factual labels, museum curators today often write labels that ask questions to help the child personally relate to the picture. For instance, the Dutch artist Frans Hals (1581–1666) painted “Portrait of a Woman with a Lace Collar and Bonnet.” This woman is wearing a high collar that is both wide and thick; it looks as if it might be difficult to swallow when wearing such a collar. A constructivist approach to this painting might be to ask children questions such as “Do you have any clothing that looks like that? Would you enjoy playing outdoors wearing something like that? Why or why not? Do you think it would be easy to eat pizza wearing such a high collar?”

After thinking about these questions, the children are able to look at the painting from a personal perspective. This type of active technique connects children to the painting, encouraging them to think about it and share their comments. As the children are guided through reflecting and talking about their experience of the painting, their understanding of it grows. In addition to seeing the painting with their eyes, they are able to put themselves in the subject’s place, to imagine wearing the same clothes, and to think about what it might be like to play while wearing such a restricting outfit. Thus, their experience of the painting is not simply visual but draws from all the senses. An experience involving multiple senses becomes more personal; this particular experience becomes richer because it has made the painting more meaningful for the child. As children become
active in their own learning process, curiosity about the world around them grows and interest in how things work is generated.

**Scaffolded Learning**

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian child psychologist, promoted “scaffolded learning.” It begins with a child who knows something and an adult who engages with the child at his level. The adult assists the child to accomplish something he could not do on his own, engaging him in activities that raise his level of knowledge. Due to the support and mentoring of the adult, the child eventually is able to accomplish the same thing independently. Programs that include repetition with variety that are designed to expand children’s experiences give librarians a way to put this type of scaffolded learning into action.

**Multiple Intelligences**

People learn in many different ways. Some learn best by hearing, and others by seeing. The majority of people, however, learn best by actually doing. When planning programs for children, it is important to keep the wide range of learning styles in mind. Preschoolers have not yet entered formal schooling and may not have had the opportunity to experiment with different learning styles. Introducing a book in ways that involve a variety of senses and experiences provides an opportunity to help awaken or strengthen a child’s particular learning style.

Howard Gardner calls these styles “intelligences.” He asserts that there are multiple intelligences and each one of them is valuable. Although it may seem that our culture places greater importance on cognitive rather than other skills, society benefits from having a world full of people with a variety of intelligences. For instance, while it is important for surgeons to have strong kinesthetic intelligence (good eye-hand coordination), composers benefit from having strong musical intelligence. NASA scientists might be most successful if their logical-mathematical intelligence was strongest, yet psychologists would do well if their strengths were interpersonal skills.

**GARDNER’S LIST OF INTELLIGENCES**

It is helpful to keep Gardner’s list of intelligences in mind when planning new ways to present a book; you can appeal to a different intelligence each time the same selected book is used in your preschool storytime sessions.

- **Linguistic intelligence** connects learning with words.
- **Logical-mathematical intelligence** connects learning with numbers or logic.
- **Spatial intelligence** connects learning with pictures.
- **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** connects learning with the body or a physical experience.
Musical intelligence connects learning with music.
Interpersonal intelligence involves learning through social experiences.
Intrapersonal intelligence connects learning with self-reflection or knowledge of oneself.
Naturalist intelligence connects learning through an experience in the social world.

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCES
Psychologist Daniel Goleman expanded Gardner's list:

Emotional intelligence (similar to Gardner's intrapersonal intelligence) uses self-awareness, confidence, and empathy for others to manage disturbing emotions and inhibit disruptive emotional impulses.21
Social intelligence (similar to Gardner's interpersonal intelligence) involves connecting with others in a deep way that influences mood and brain chemistry.22
Ecological intelligence connects awareness of and appreciation for our environment with decisions regarding what we buy, sell, make, and discard.23

Using multiple intelligences to teach goes beyond conventional and logical methods.24 Introducing a particular book in preschool storytime and then presenting it a variety of ways that builds on different types of intelligences can expand a child's horizons. After having listened to a storybook, if children have the opportunity to re-create the story themselves by acting, singing, making something, and talking about it, they are bound to have a much richer appreciation of it. And, if linguistic or spatial intelligence are not their strong points, they will still be able to connect strongly to the story.

Every Child Ready to Read @ your library

Every Child Ready to Read® (ECRR) @ your library is a research-based early literacy outreach program centered on the principle that a parent is a child's first and most valuable teacher. The program was developed by a task force including representatives from the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and the Public Library Association (PLA) and based on research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health.25 This program originally focused on language skills but now highlights five practices as being essential for helping children develop reading readiness.26 It provides workshop materials for librarians to present to parents and caregivers that teach ways to incorporate these five practices into their daily interactions with their children. While ECRR uses the five practices to promote six essential language skills, the program also assists in the development of the whole child.
THE FIVE PRACTICES

Talking: Speaking with children introduces them to new words. Asking questions, then listening and responding to answers, strengthens communication skills and increases bonding between children and their adults. Talking with an adult about books and illustrations expands a child’s understanding of the story and can translate into greater understanding about the world around them.

Singing: Words set to music are easier to remember than spoken words. Notes and rhythms in music help define sounds, and when syllables in words are sung, more attention is focused on the syllables in those words. That, as well as clapping to the words of songs, helps to develop phonological awareness. Additionally, singing together creates community. Songs with movements strengthen fine and gross motor skills.

Reading: Adults who read joyfully with their children help to instill a lifelong love of books and reading. ECRR states, “Reading is an essential life skill”; positive reading experiences in childhood set the stage for a love of reading and appreciation of books. When an adult reads the same book a number of times, children see that the story remains the same and understand that reading is a way to decode the written word.

Writing: Although preschoolers may not be able to write words, they can understand that there is a connection between letters, the written word, and the spoken word. By seeing print in their environment and experiencing the many ways that words can be used, children learn that reading is important. Scribbling is a precursor to writing; it involves fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination, and allows children to express themselves via print.27 Fingerplays help to develop fine motor skills needed for writing, as well as eye-hand coordination.

Playing: Play is essential for the healthy development of children.28 Physical play involves coordination of muscles (gross motor skills for large muscles and fine motor skills for small ones). Playing matching games that compare shapes, colors, and sizes helps children develop cognitive skills that are precursors to reading and learning numbers. Dramatic play encourages social and emotional development as children act out various roles, create narratives, and discover the cause and effect of different behaviors. Scenarios during dramatic play are often stories that have a beginning, middle, and end. During group play, children experience the sharing of toys and the building of relationships. Playing with others improves social awareness and sense of self.29 Team play teaches cooperation while allowing children to experience dependency. Talking during play strengthens oral language skills.30 Play provides an emotional outlet and can become a vehicle for expression. Organized play teaches teamwork, taking turns, and following directions. Creative play sparks the imagination, encouraging children to see beyond the concrete and explore unknown possibilities, fostering understanding of abstract concepts.31
An Overview of Preschool Storytime

Since children learn through play, it stands to reason that by presenting books in a playful manner children will learn more from them. Instead of simply addressing the content of the book, the reenactment and related activities unleash the imagination, engage children in problem solving, and provide opportunities for peer interactions.

Incorporating Technology into Programs

Many librarians are uncomfortable with the idea of incorporating technology into their preschool storytimes on a regular basis. We know that there is nothing quite like physically holding a book in your hands and sharing it enthusiastically with children. The American Medical Association has recommended that children under the age of 2 have no screen time at all and that children between ages 3 and 5 limit television viewing to a maximum of two hours. Studies have shown that children under the age of 5 who are prolonged television watchers have fewer social skills and a higher risk for behavior problems than children who do not watch much television.

However, technology does not just mean television, and technology abounds in today’s world. Computers, televisions, smart phones, DVD players, MP3 players, and Wii games have become part of a shared vocabulary. It is likely that more technological tools that have not yet been invented will be become everyday items in the near future for our youngest learners. Exposure to technology can be beneficial even for children from ages 3 to 5 if carefully designed. Computer play can involve exploration and discovery; it can help improve nonverbal skills, structural knowledge, long-term memory, manual dexterity, verbal skills, problem solving, abstraction, and conceptual skills. Use of computers can provide a creative approach to science and math and “encourage debate, adaptation, analysis, and celebration.” If public libraries aim to help improve literacy and narrow the digital divide, including some sort of technology into preschool storytimes might thus be considered.

DIGITAL LITTLES

Digital Littles, a technology-rich preschool storytime experience, is offered on a regular basis at the main Indianapolis Public Library as well as in several of its branches. It includes laptops and a robotic dinosaur! During these programs, storytimes are combined with hands-on technology activities. For instance, after reading the book Where’s Tumpty? by Polly Dunbar, children use a flip camera to make a movie of the subsequent hide-and-seek game they play in the library. The movie is then uploaded to the computer and projected on a big screen for all storytime participants to see. This provides a good opportunity for an exciting variation that expands the experience of a book presented at storytime. It also gives children a chance to work as a team, to experience sequencing of events, and to develop their vocabulary. Handouts for parents describe the day’s activities, the skills practiced and learned, related books, and follow-up activities that can be done at home both with and without a computer.
Abby Brown, early literacy specialist, explains that children enjoy extending their storytime experiences by drawing digital pictures related to a book featured in storytime using programs such as KidPix or Microsoft Paint and participating in other programs offered via the PNC-sponsored Digital Littles Mobile Lab. Tami Edminister, program specialist at the Indianapolis Marion County Public Library, has found that many librarians who originally did not want to use technology in their storytimes became supporters once they had tried it.

THE INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN’S DIGITAL LIBRARY
The International Children’s Digital Library (ICDL) is a database that contains picture books from around the world. Books can be “read” in many different formats, including typical two page spreads, comic book format, and spiral reader. Through ICDL, librarians have access to books that are hard to find, out of print, or in different languages. Digital storytimes using ICDL require a computer (laptop is fine), a projector, and a projection screen. The book is located on ICDL via the computer and projected onto the screen, and pages are turned with the click of a mouse. A study comparing traditional storytimes with digital storytimes found that preschoolers were less fidgety in the digital storytimes. In the traditional preschool storytimes, the presenter sat in front of the children, held the book open, and turned book pages manually. In the digital storytime, the presenter sat with the children and viewed the stories on a large screen with them while turning pages with a click of a wireless mouse. In these examples, the presenter seemed to be part of the activity rather than directing it.

In “Creative Ways to Use Digital Group Storytimes in the Classroom or Library,” Lauren Collen presents a number of ways that ICDL can be integrated into storytimes. Large images on a screen are much easier to view than illustrations constrained to book size only. Wordless books projected on a bigger screen (with technology that can enlarge the pages even more, if desired) allow children to see small details they might otherwise miss. This benefit enables children to decode storylines for themselves via the illustrations and helps them experience narrative skills long before they have learned to read words. After holding a digital storytime, librarians can give the online address of books read aloud to parents, and children can then be encouraged to explore the book on their own on a computer in the library or at home, on an iPad, a netbook, or even a smartphone.

Since possibilities for integrating technology into preschool storytime will only increase in the future, suggestions for incorporating a digital aspect will be included in some of the storytime scenarios in the following pages.

Themes
Most library literature on programming for preschoolers focuses on themes. Librarians are encouraged to choose a topic for each session and then build programs around the theme by utilizing picture books, songs, finger plays, music, and crafts. A program on
teddy bears will include a rhyme such as “Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, Turn Around,” while the next week’s program on hot drinks may include “I’m a Little Teapot.” This means that none of the bear rhymes or books are repeated, since everything now focuses on hot drinks. Although there may be standard opening and closing rituals used in every program, the core of traditional preschool theme-based storytimes includes mostly new material; there is little continuity from week to week.

Building circle times around themes makes sense for day care centers, since their daily schedules are often based on curriculum-coordinated themes. If children are studying colors for a month, they may have one week focusing on green, one week focusing on red, and one week focusing on yellow. Their circle times will then include material related to a colors theme. This makes sense because the theme continues for more than one hour—it is usually mentioned each day for an entire week, enabling the children to attach new information to something they have already learned. The circle-time theme is just part of a larger curriculum theme that might also include art projects, role-playing activities in the dress-up corner, science activities, playground games, snacks, and much more. This type of learning takes place on an ongoing basis within a specific context, enabling the children to build multiple connections.

Preschool storytimes at the public library, however, generally take place only once a week, and there is often little repetition from program to program. The theme is a tool for the librarian to help make programming easier, but generally has little relevance to the participants because it was used only on a one-time basis. Once the preschool storytime has ended, the theme may be extended via a handout to parents, or with a follow-up craft activity. But generally, as soon as the storytime ends, the theme is forgotten.

Another problem inherent in building a program around a randomly chosen theme is that the librarian often can find only one or two good books on the topic. In order to incorporate other books, the librarian generally has to comb the collection. While the original book might be great, the rest of the books might not have similar literary merit but are picked anyway because of their content. The same might be said about related songs and fingerplays. Thus, storytimes built on randomly chosen themes have a small likelihood of songs, rhymes, and books being repeated from week to week, and by virtue of the desire to connect everything to an arbitrary theme, the quality of the material presented may be compromised.

### Presenting a Book in Multiple Ways

The idea of using a picture book with children on a repeated basis and expanding the experience of the book into other areas is already an accepted practice in the field of early childhood education. “Read, Play, and Learn!”, a transdisciplinary, play-based, storybook-oriented curriculum designed by Toni W. Linder, provides a wonderful example of ways to help children develop skills in all the developmental domains. Designed for use in inclusive classrooms to help build the skills of children with a wide range of
abilities, this curriculum is comprised of a series of sixteen instructional modules, each built around a particular picture book. In addition to using a book in circle time every day for two weeks, an entire environment in the classroom is created around the book, which greatly extends the story. Children are challenged in playful, fun ways to build on already existing skills through art, science, math, movement, and drama-based activities.

Each module includes planning sheets that explain ways to encourage learning across the developmental domains. A literacy-rich environment based on that particular storybook is created that includes “an area to dramatize the story; a literacy center; areas for sensory and motor play, an art area; and sites for science and math activities, floor play, table play, outdoor play, woodworking, and snack” with the intent of building levels of understanding and learning on the sensorimotor level, the functional level, and the symbolic level. The sensorimotor level, also called the exploratory level, addresses the beginning stages of learning through sensory exploration, physical manipulation of the environment, social interactions, and concrete labels and meanings. The functional level of learning is attained when children use functional objects and actions to sequence ideas and actions. They watch and listen, imitate and relate. The symbolic level is when children move beyond the concrete and represent their understanding of the story through fantasy play, dance, music, art, storytelling, drawing, and print.

Vocabulary, actions, and information related to the themes contained in the storybooks are expanded into activities that enhance cognitive (problem-solving), social-emotional, communication and language, and sensorimotor skills. Emerging literacy development is also encouraged through the child’s familiarity and comfort with the storybook and the activities and environment developed for the module.

In Picture Books Plus, Sue McCleaf Nespeca and Joan B. Reeve provide a wealth of art, drama, music, math, and science activities that can be used to extend picture books beyond simply reading them aloud. And, although it is geared toward preschool teachers, the Story Stretchers books contain picture book expansion activities that involve art; music and movement; cooking and snack time; creative dramatics; dress-up; science fun; block building; nature study; and math games.

Incorporating Repetition into Preschool Storytime

Read once, a book may leave a small impression on a child. Storytime becomes a much richer learning experience when repetition is incorporated in a way that involves many senses and extends children’s experience of the book, enhancing cognitive, social, emotional, and problem-solving skills while promoting literacy and creative thinking. Reading a book during an initial storytime session introduces it to children; using the book in subsequent weeks by reading it again, telling it, acting it out, running an activity that
relates to some aspect of the book; and finding ways to involve different senses expand children’s connection with and appreciation for that book. It also enhances early literacy skills. Creative ways can be found to tie the content or the book illustrations to fields such as math, science, social studies, art, and music.

Although there is not much published research on repetition in preschool storytime, there is a fair amount of research on related topics such as the value of preschool storytime, the value of play, early literacy, child care activities for preschoolers, child development, reading books aloud, engaging children with disabilities, expanding books beyond their cover, and book illustration for children. When combined, these sources make a strong case for using a book repeatedly in preschool storytime, and, it is optimally beneficial if the book is repeated in a different way each time.

Preparing for these programs can be hard work. Instead of simply reading the book, the presenter has to think of a few different creative ways to present the book that reinforce the story while stimulating a variety of intelligences and senses. Is it really worth the effort?

**Leveling the Playing Field**

Studies suggest that children who live in poverty have low literacy skills and often are not “ready to learn” when they enter kindergarten. Interacting with caring adults and observing appropriate behavior can make a difference; through guided, playful activities in the library, children living in difficult circumstances have opportunities to speak, think, and behave in literate ways. Learning how to retell stories provides the “narrative techniques that they [preschoolers] have absorbed from their experiences of hearing written language” and the syntax necessary for complex thinking; both are powerful and important tools for children.

Programs in public libraries are open to children from all economic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds. One reason for providing these programs is to give equal opportunity to access good early literacy skills and therefore, give every child better opportunities to succeed in school and in life. What better reason could there be to experiment with using repetition with variety during your preschool storytimes and see for yourself if it makes a difference?

**NOTES**


36. To find out more about Digital Littles, view this YouTube video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=285SzMgiVEk.


40. Ibid., 12.


www.alastore.ala.org


44. Ibid., 8.

45. Ibid., 9.

46. Ibid., 5.


### Resources regarding Preschool Storytime, Theories of Learning, and Repetition


An Overview of Preschool Storytime


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