



Overview of Emergent Literacy Project

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The Public Library Association's Early Literacy Initiative began in 2000 with a partnership with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), a division of the National Institutes of Health. NICHD had just released the National Reading Panel's report, providing research-based findings concerning reading development in America's children.

The report, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*, had information useful to parents, child care providers and public librarians. The first step in the partnership with NICHD was to help disseminate information about the report through our country's public libraries – a process that began with the 2001 PLA Spring Symposium programs and continues with all Initiative programs and publicity.

A more significant aspect of the partnership, also debuted at the PLA Spring Symposium, was to develop model public library programs incorporating this research. Public libraries have the ability to reach thousands of parents, caregivers and children and to greatly impact the early reading experiences of preschool children. PLA contracted with Dr. Grover C. Whitehurst and Dr. Christopher Lonigan, well-known researchers in emergent literacy, to develop a model program for parents and caregivers. The premise of these research-based materials is to enlist parents and caregivers as partners in preparing their children for learning to read and to provide the most effective methods to achieve this end. Whitehurst and Lonigan have created a unique structure for the distinctive phases of a young child's emergent literacy – pretalkers, talkers and pre-readers – that is developed on this website.

To broaden the dissemination of these materials and to test their effectiveness, PLA and ALSC formed a partnership to pilot these materials in public libraries across the country. In October 2001, eighteen demonstration sites were selected representing a wide range of library size and demographics (see website for a complete listing). Demonstration sites are testing the materials on a wide range of audiences within the library and the community, and they are using an evaluation method created by Dr. Virginia Walter, past president of ALSC and professor at UCLA. The evaluation includes standard output measures and pioneers an interview method for assessing the outcomes achieved in using the materials and methods. Parent/caregiver evaluations are specific to each of the three developmental stages of reading readiness and are designed to show whether parents incorporated needed skill-building activities into their time with their preschool children. Reports will be provided to the public library community concerning the status of the demonstration sites.

An additional resource has been developed by the National Center for Learning Disabilities. *Get Ready to Read!* is a screening tool for parents to use with their four-year-old children. PLA is in partnership with NCLD to distribute this screening tool to the demonstration sites, and to provide information on the screening tool to public libraries. An online version of the screening tool is available, along with other related early literacy information, at www.getreadytoread.org.

The intent of these partnerships and programs is to firmly establish public libraries as a partner in the educational continuum, and to validate our contributions by linking our activities to relevant research and evaluation. Public librarians must agree to partner with the young child's most important teachers – parents and caregivers – and to leverage our work in influencing a child's development. We believe that these model programs will allow all libraries to be more productive and influential in our communities.

Steering Committee:

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