

Engaging Communities in Equity-Centered Research: Librarians as Partners in the Science of Reading

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Published June 29, 2023

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Cite as:

Johnson, L., Duclos-Francois, J., King-St. Remy, S., Smith, J., Timm Fulkerson, C., Campbell, D., & Hines, K. (2023, June 29). *Engaging communities in equity-centered research: Librarians as partners in the science of reading*. Florida Center for Reading Research. fcrr.org



DEFINING THE NEED

Librarians play an important role in our local communities in supporting literacy development and fostering a love for reading. In order to meet the library's annual plan goals around increasing knowledge of language and literacy development, youth services librarians will participate in a series of professional development workshops facilitated by the Florida Center for Reading Research.

THE PROJECT

Purpose

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a professional development series, rooted in the science of reading, in increasing youth services librarians' knowledge and self-efficacy to combat educational disparities related to literacy. For the purpose of this study, self-efficacy was defined as the librarian's confidence in their own ability to implement evidence-based practices for language and literacy in story-time programming. The study also examined the potential benefits of leveraging community partners such as public libraries to bolster literacy outcomes, specifically through shared storybook reading, which has been associated with positive outcomes for language and literacy.

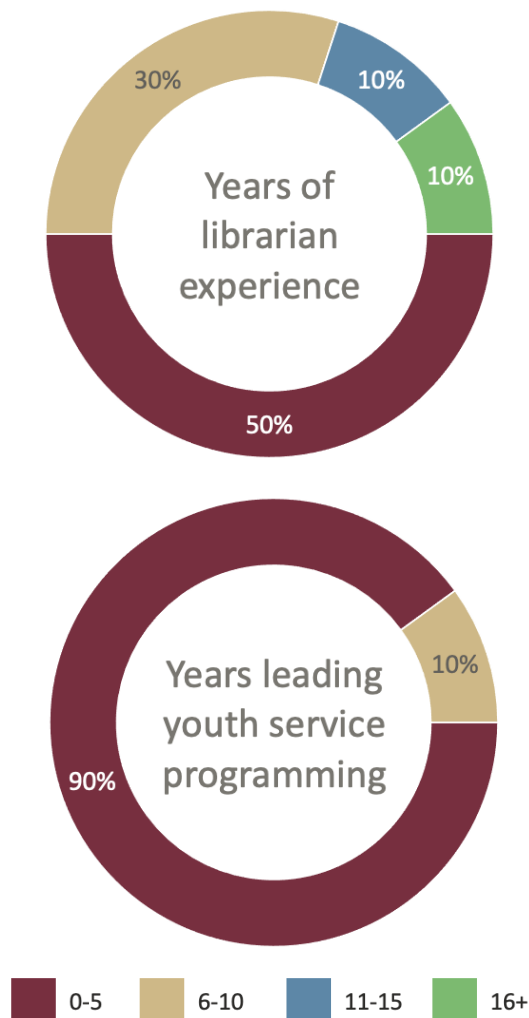
Research Questions

1. Is there a change in librarian knowledge of language development and emergent literacy skills after participating in targeted professional development?
2. Did self-efficacy improve after participating in targeted professional development?

Participants

Ten youth services librarians from the seven branches of a North Florida public library system were recruited to participate. The participants ranged in their experience in library services. Half of the librarians had between 0-5 years of experience, three librarians had between 6-10 years of experience, and two had over 10 years of experience. All but one participant led youth programming for 5 years or less.

Figure 1. Demographic Data



METHOD

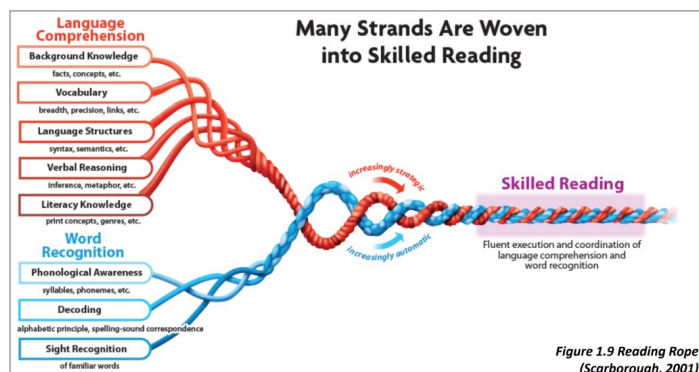
Professional Development Training

Ten youth services librarians completed a six-week professional development training. The training consisted of weekly one-hour synchronous virtual sessions. During the training, librarians were presented with information and given opportunities to practice. The librarians completed a pre-survey and post-survey to measure their knowledge of oral language development and emergent literacy skills.

Knowledge & Efficacy Survey

Librarians completed a pre-survey and post-survey to measure their knowledge of oral language development and emergent literacy skills. The Qualtrics survey consisted of 40 questions: 25 measuring their knowledge of language and reading development and 15 measuring their self-efficacy for utilizing skills in this area.

“The reading rope diagram did a great job of explaining how all the different factors ‘weave’ into skilled reading. Seeing it all together really emphasized all the elements we can support in storytime (and how complicated and amazing reading truly is!)”



Source. “Scarborough’s Reading Rope - International Dyslexia Association,” 2021

Table 1. Professional Development Sessions Overview

Week	Corresponding Knowledge PD Lesson	Librarian Competency
1	Foundations of Language Development	Understands theories of infant, child, and adolescent learning, literacy development and brain development, and their implications for library service
2	Introduction to the Science of Reading and the Connection Between Oral Language and Literacy	Understands current educational practices, especially those related to literacy and inquiry
5	Shared book reading practices	
3	Oral language and print awareness	Designs, promotes, presents, and evaluates a variety of diverse programs for children, with consideration of equity, diversity, and inclusion; principles of child development; and the needs, interests, and goals of all children, their caregivers, and educators in the community
4	Letter knowledge and phonological awareness	
6	Utilizing Book Nook Bundles to increase family engagement	Integrates literacy-development techniques in program design and delivery, engaging and empowering caregivers in a culturally aware way

RESULTS

Change in Knowledge Scores

- ▶ Statistical Analysis: Paired Sample T-test
- ▶ All participants showed increases in pre- to post-test knowledge scores except one
- ▶ The librarians presented with a statistically significant mean increase of 3.800, $t(9) = 4.835$, $p < .001$ between administration of the pre- and post-knowledge surveys

Levels of Self-Efficacy

- ▶ Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistics (medians) and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test
- ▶ Based upon the medians, librarians presented with lower levels of self-efficacy as related to both language and development prior to Professional Development (PD)

- ▶ The PD elicited a statistically significant median increase ($p < .05$) in self-efficacy according to the post survey compared to the pre-survey
- ▶ Non-statistically significant median differences were observed for answering questions, expansion of child responses, and asking a variety of questions
- ▶ Following participation in the PD, the librarians presented with a statistically significant mean increase of 3.800, 95% CI [2.022, 5.578], $t(9) = 4.835$, $p < .001$ between administration of the pre and post knowledge surveys

Table 2. Self-Efficacy results

To what extent do you feel your shared reading sessions model the following strategies with parents/ caregivers using a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much):	Pre-Survey Median	Post-Survey Median	Median Difference	Z-Statistic	p-value
Expanding and extending what the child says (n=10)	3.00	3.50	0.50	-1.930	.054
Asking a variety of question types (e.g., yes/no, open-ended, wh-, cloze, distancing) (n=10)	3.00	4.00	1.00	-1.775	.076
Ability to answer questions (n=10)	3.50	4.50	1.00	-1.809	.070
Vocabulary development (n=10)	2.00	4.00	2.00	-2.157	.031*
Knowledge of the alphabet (n=9)	3.00	4.00	1.00	-2.414	.016*
Knowledge of the sounds letters make (n=9)	2.00	4.00	2.00	-2.414	.016*
Print awareness concepts (n=10)	3.00	4.00	1.00	-2.388	.017*
Phonological awareness skills (n=10)	2.00	4.00	2.00	-2.410	.016*
Decode simple words (n=10)	2.00	4.00	2.00	-2.694	.007*
Comprehension skills (n=10)	3.00	4.50	1.50	-2.414	.016*
Defining new vocabulary using child-friendly definitions (n=10)	2.00	3.50	1.50	-2.701	.007*
Making connections to the real world and activating background knowledge (n=10)	3.00	4.00	1.00	-2.239	.025*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

This project was designed in response to our partners' request to increase knowledge around the science of reading. Our findings demonstrate that it is possible to teach community partners, such as librarians, the importance of the connections between early language development and later literacy skills in a small number of sessions. Both knowledge and self-efficacy improved. The participants in this project will be able to model skills learned during story time sessions, and other youth services programming to meet community needs.

IMPLICATIONS

Recommended best practices for librarians include knowledge of integrating literacy development into programming design and delivery, such as that provided in this training (Association of Library Services to Children, 2022). Future research includes expanding to libraries who serve vulnerable communities and developing sustainable materials that can be used for librarians to engage in continued learning in an asynchronous manner.



Engaging librarians in the science of reading

References

Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC). (2022, August 11). Competencies for librarians serving children in Libraries. Retrieved June 1 2023, from <https://www.ala.org/alsc/edcareers/alsccorecomps>.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the participants who partnered with FCRR & The Village to make this work possible. Several authors are supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305B200020 and Grant H325D190011. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

About FCRR

The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) is an interdisciplinary research center at Florida State University. Drawing from multiple disciplines, FCRR investigates all aspects of reading and reading-related skills across the lifespan. Through rigorous and robust research, innovation, and engagement, FCRR advances the science of reading to improve learning and achievement from birth through adulthood.