



# Components of a Successful World Language Storytime

[www.hclib.org](http://www.hclib.org)

**World Language Storytimes can be offered for babies, toddlers, preschoolers and families. Family Storytimes serve families who attend library programs with multiple children. As a result, World Language Storytimes may include books and activities to accommodate a wide range of ages. Hennepin County Library (HCL) provides these storytimes in languages that the library's World Language Collection supports.**

In the early years of children's lives, formal learning in their native language promotes "academic achievement and literacy in a second language" (Cummins 1979; Oller and Eilers 2002; Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass 2005; Thomas and Collier 2002). The goal of World Language Storytimes is formal early literacy practice for families who speak a language other than English. Depending on your target audience (see the HCL document "World Language Storytime Best Practices"), these storytimes also may accommodate families who speak English at home but who want their children exposed to a second language. Both of these situations are valuable. In either case, early literacy should remain the focus.

Following are the six early literacy skill areas as they relate to World Language Storytimes. The related document "World Language Storytime Best Practices" covers how these components can be presented with a community partner who is a native speaker of your target language.

## Print Awareness

- Encourage children to print their own nametags. Encourage parents to have children practice writing their names at home.
- Add "print words" to the environment. When reading books about colors, for example, make a big rainbow with the names of the colors spelled out in one target language only (such as Spanish). Research indicates that children learn two languages best when the languages are kept separate; therefore, label things that are used in instruction in only one language.

- Use flip charts with the words to action songs and fingerplays in only one language.

- Provide handouts in both English and the target language for parents and caregivers to take home. Parents who are learning English will understand the songs with these handouts. Having the words also in their native language may increase their participation in the library program and will encourage the singing of these songs at home. Providing both languages on one page is acceptable in this context since the words are not for the children to read, but are only for the parents' benefit.

## Vocabulary

- Use stories that are vocabulary rich. Explain the meaning of unfamiliar words before reading the story aloud. Use props to support your explanations. Focus on one language at a time rather than explaining words from two languages at once.
- As with any storytime, the vocabulary should reflect the children's developmental abilities. Remember that a four-year-old from a literacy-rich home will be able to handle more complex text than a four-year-old from a home environment that is not literacy-rich (Hart and Risley 1981). Read the text first and assess how many words would need explanation; if you have more than ten unfamiliar words, the book is too difficult.
- Use objects from the target culture to encourage further conversation and expand understanding of the object. Ask your native-speaking partner for ideas (e.g., when reading a Hmong story about turtles, you may want to bring in a Hmong storycloth that depicts turtles).
- Theme-based storytimes build vocabulary and promote further conversation (Passe 2005). All stories may be on the same topic. Use props and puppets to show objects that are in the story. Singing activities may be related to the main theme. For example, a storytime about pizza could have pizza books, pizza songs and an emphasis on the letter "P" and the sound that letter makes, as well as a discussion about new words related to pizza such as tomatoes, mushrooms and red peppers.

- Use books with realistic and literal illustrations that support the text. If you can tell the story by looking only at the pictures, then you have a good example of literal translation. Families who have not been in formal literacy settings benefit most from these types of books.

- When choosing books, be aware that there may be slight variations in the words used by people who speak the same language but who are from different regions or countries. (For example, just as English terms or spellings may be different in books published in the U.S., England, Australia or New Zealand, words in Spanish may be unfamiliar when the books are published in Spain, Mexico, Argentina or the U.S.) Encourage parents and caregivers to participate. When there is an unfamiliar term in the target language, ask families what they call a hat, or a fox, or a skunk, or whatever word needs clarification. Keep a list of these words that you can refer to in other stories in subsequent storytime sessions. This is an excellent way to build new vocabulary for you and for your audience.

- You even could make a “word wall” where, for example, you add to lists of what different animals are called in the same language in different countries. At the top of the word wall, have a picture of the animal or item. Use only words in one language, and do not mix that target language and English.

### **Narrative Skills**

- Use a puppet to help tell and retell a story, reinforcing narrative skills, concepts and participation.

- Many cultures have strong oral traditions. Invite storytime parents and caregivers to retell stories from their childhoods, or lead songs that they sang as children (Duran 2006). Using parent resources will enrich your storytimes and reinforce the parents’ roles as teachers.

- Many parents and caregivers may feel shy and uncomfortable. You need to provide strong encouragement for them to participate. Participation is more natural when telling stories with repetition. Provide extra support for children and parents who have not been in formal storytime settings in the past. Tell them that it is okay to act silly or to not know all of the words. Using some of the same songs and fingerplays throughout a series of storytimes will build their confidence.

- Wordless books are great for parents and caregivers who may have a low-literacy level in their native language or in English. Model for parents and caregivers how to tell stories and have rich conversations using wordless books. Before starting with wordless books, have just one picture and prompt adults to talk about it with their children. You might say, “In this picture, what do you see? The mommy is holding the baby, and they are smiling. Why do you think they are smiling?” Then provide wordless books and tell families they can make their own stories with these books. Give them time to practice on their own at the end of storytime. If the books are related to your theme, that is even better.

### **Phonological Awareness**

- Use culturally familiar music, fingerplays and rhymes. These activities help with rhyming and alliteration (Duran 2006). Reinforce early phonological skills *in the child’s native language* using rhyming and alliteration in the child’s native language. This technique will improve English literacy as well (Durgunoğlu, Nagy and Hancin-Bhatt 1993).

- When you sing common American songs and nursery rhymes in the native language, such as “The Itsy-Bitsy Spider” in Spanish, you are creating new traditions for families. Tell parents that their children might be learning these songs in English in preschool or kindergarten, so learning them in their native language first will help their children understand what the songs or nursery rhymes mean when they hear them in English at school.

- Choose nonfiction books, fiction books, fingerplays, songs and props that are related by theme to ensure a repetition of words and sounds. Point out words that start with the same sounds, or look for children’s names that start with the same sound as the title of the book.

- Choose books that incorporate rhyme, and point out rhymes to the children. Play a clapping game where the storytime leader says a word and the audience comes up with a word that rhymes. This can be done in any language, although some languages have more rhymes than others, so you may need your native-speaking partner to give you advice about how to best address rhyming in the target language.

### **Letter Knowledge**

- Have a “Letter of the Week.” Encourage families to emphasize that letter and letter sound in their everyday lives throughout the rest of that week. Talk about finding the letter in environmental print as well as in books or songs they do together outside of storytime to continue the storytime experience.

- Use the Letter of the Week to “sponsor” your storytime (e.g., “This storytime is brought to you by the letter ‘J’”), and have a few items in your storytime space that begin with your chosen letter. Ask the kids to name other things that begin with that letter.

- Do theme-based storytimes based upon the chosen Letter of the Week, or read stories all relating to a single *word* for which you can stick the letters on a flannel board (e.g., P-E-R-R-O for *dog* in Spanish).

- Have letters available for children to use, such as alphabet carpet squares to sit on or a magnetic board with letters that kids can use to spell out their names after storytime.

- Choose fun alphabet books to share, such as *A is for airplane / A es para avión*.

- Namerags give children an opportunity to spell their names out loud. As kids are reciting their names to you, ask them if you got the letters in the right places. Or say, “Your name begins with the letter ‘B.’ What else begins with ‘B’?”

- Point to the title of each book as you read it. Ask the children if any of them have a name starting with the letter beginning the first or subsequent words.

- Have a mystery bag with objects that start with the same letter as the Letter of the Week. You also could ask children to bring objects for next week’s letter. This builds vocabulary and also encourages families to continue thinking about storytime during the rest of the week.

### Print Motivation

- Use a variety of books to show the range of enjoyable books for various interests of children. Use fiction and nonfiction that highlight people and activities that might be familiar to the children or their parents (e.g., for Spanish, Diane Gonzales Bertrand’s *Las empanadas que bacía la abuela* or George Ancona’s *Somos Latinos* series. Children respond well to Lucy Cousins’s *Maisy* series because they recognize the characters.

- Encourage parents and children to sit together or very close, providing a family bond during storytime.

- Model how much fun reading is. Tell children they are doing a great job helping you read.

- Use a variety of formats: big books, pop-up books, flannel stories.

- Show children what fun it is to read silly stories such as David Shannon’s *¡No, David!* or Anthony Browne’s *Mi Papá*, which also stimulates their imaginations.

- Select favorite picture books to have in your storytime space, telling families to select as many as they want to check out to bring home and share together.

- Encourage parents to understand that reading books to children should be a fun activity.

### Other Suggestions

- Plan how you will share information about the early literacy skills with parents during your World Language Storytimes. One strategy is to have a large sticky note on the book to remind the reader (whether it is the librarian or the native-speaking partner) to connect it to one of the six early literacy skills. The librarian and the native-speaking partner plan the early literacy dialogue together.

- World Language Storytimes should be scheduled regularly. For example, do not offer Spanish storytimes only during Cinco de Mayo or Hispanic Heritage Month.

- A series of four weekly sessions works best when using a community partner to assist you. The day of the week and the time of day you offer World Language Storytimes will depend on your community.

- In your storytime space, showcase your World Language Collection, including fiction, nonfiction and non-print materials such as music CDs and audiobooks for both children and adults.

- Look for nonfiction books on more topics than just colors and shapes. Search for books about visits to the doctor, going to school, traveling through airports, going to the store, being with grandparents, etc. This is helpful for recent immigrants; they are often reading for information rather than recreation.

- If possible, do your World Language Storytimes out in the community where your target audience is already comfortable, such as at a church, community organization, English Language Learner site or ethnic grocery store, etc.

- Tell parents that using the library and reading in both English and the children’s native language will help their children learn better in school.

### Parent Involvement

- Parents who speak a language other than English may not have any experience with libraries in the United States or with storytimes. Take time at the end of the World Language Storytime to explain library services, to show different parts of the collection, to highlight the World Language Collection for both adults and children, and to get families registered for library cards.

- Parents may not know that you are modeling early literacy skills, so it is important to explain why parent involvement is important and why they should read with their children at home. In some cultures, reading at home is not a habit that is practiced. Everyone wants their children to succeed in school, but not everyone knows that they as parents or caregivers are a critical part of that success. Thank parents for bringing their children to the library and for being such wonderful teachers and for sharing stories with their children.

- Ask parents to tell stories from their childhood and to lead songs. This not only enriches your storytime, but also keeps adults engaged in the program.

- Parents have received conflicting information regarding using their native language with their children versus learning English only. Validate parents’ feelings of concern about learning English. We now know the positive outcomes in learning multiple languages and school achievement. Explain to parents that they may encounter school staff and others who have not yet been exposed to this information, but that research indicates that children will do better in school if they maintain their native language. Reinforce the fact that their

children are surrounded by English and that they will quickly learn English in school. Parents are the best teachers at home using their native language. With this teaching at home, their children will do better in school.

•Therefore, encourage parents and caregivers to read, sing and talk with their children. Our goal is to help parents help their children to have the skills they need in order to be ready to learn to read and to succeed in school.

## Contributions and References

- Campos, S.J. 1995. *The Carpenteria preschool program: A long-term effects study*. In García, E.E. and McLaughlin, B., eds. *Meeting the challenge of linguistic and cultural diversity in early childhood education*, 34-48. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cloud, N.; Genessee, F.; and Hamayan, E. 2000. *Dual language instruction: A handbook for enriched education*. Boston: Heinle.
- Cummins, J. 1979. Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research* 49: 222-51.
- Duran, L. 2006. Presentation for Hennepin County Library (Minnetonka, MN) on appropriate practices to support early literacy development in young English language learners.
- Duran, L. 2006. Early literacy consultant to Hennepin County Library (Minnetonka, MN) for the World Languages Storytime Project.
- Durgunoğlu, A.Y.; Nagy, W.E.; and Hancin-Bhatt, B.J. 1993. Cross-language transfer of phonological awareness. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 85 (3): 453-65.
- Hart, B., and Risley, T.R. 1981. Grammatical and conceptual growth in the language of psychologically disadvantaged children: Assessment and intervention. In Begab, M.J.; Garger H.; and Hayward, H.C., eds. *Psycho-social influences in retarded performance: Strategies for improving competence*, 181-98. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.
- Oller, D.K., and Eilers, R.E., eds. 2002. *Language and literacy in bilingual children*. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Passe, A. 2005. Presentation on creating literacy environments as consultant to the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA).
- Passe, A. 2006. Early literacy consultant to Hennepin County Library (Minnetonka, MN) for the World Languages Storytime Project.
- Rolstad, K.; Mahoney, K.; and Glass, G. 2005. The big picture: A meta-analysis of program effectiveness research on English language learners. *Educational Policy* 19 (4): 572-94.
- Thomas, W. and Collier, V. 2002. A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement. Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED475048.