

I know what you're probably thinking...Well, she looks just like a librarian. Bun, glasses, sensible shoes. And she's going to talk about early literacy: what a relief: an easy topic to nod and smile about, nothing controversial here. OK. I'm glad you are comfortable, but I am not a trained librarian. I trained as an historian and worked in museum education before being hired as the children's Services director at Warsaw Public Library. It's a quirky personal path, but I have found that the library world is a flexible one, that values what people bring to it, as well as what it has to offer. That makes libraries an especially interesting part of the educational infrastructure of New York.

This morning, we are focusing on Libraries' efforts in the area of early literacy. It seems as if research keeps pushing back the limits of education, as we focus on younger and younger children in order to realize their potential. What better place than the library to engage these very young children? One of the common experiences we have is when a young woman, who hasn't used the public library in years comes in looking for pregnancy books. It's a chance to start a new relationship. We haven't yet defined early literacy as starting with pregnancy books, but we do include infants in story time.

Recent guidance issued by the US Department of Education encourages states to use federal funding for early childhood education and pointed to the defining characteristics of high quality early childhood programs including: a content-rich curriculum that facilitates imaginative play, supports social and

emotional development, and actively builds verbal reasoning skills. To these ears, and I hope to yours as well, this sounds exactly like a library story time.

As public institutions, libraries are responsible for using our resources wisely. That means paying attention to research, cooperating with as many partners as possible, to make our reach longer, and making the most difference we can.

The Head Start center for Wyoming County is located in Warsaw, so I am able to provide library resources to the children in those classes. I visit them each month to do a story time. The relationship is a robust one: we have shared training opportunities for teachers and parents through programs offered by the Pioneer Library System in addition to story times at the center and at the library.

When Universal Prekindergarten started in our school district, another opportunity arose for the public library. The prekindergarten classes are held at two locations outside the school district buildings. One at the local YMCA, and another at a community action daycare center. I have become the “library teacher” for those prekindergarten students. I make monthly visits to bring books that support their curriculum, as well as introducing them to the library as a place for them and their families to explore and use outside of school hours.

The resources I can bring to these situations are exponentially greater because of the Pioneer Library System. The staff at the system level have worked over the past 16 years to make sure that I am aware of changes in the library field, that I have access to the most important research on child development and literacy, that I have the ability to bring books and other things, like musical instruments and even robots, with me when I visit classrooms and community events. As one library, we would not have these resources.

I want to tell you about one of the books I read during my school visits this week. It is a retelling of an old folk tale: "The Gigantic Turnip" You may know this story....

The version I used is a retelling of the story by Jan Brett, titled, "The Turnip," The twist she put on it is that in the end, a hidden bear family pushes the turnip up from underground, unseen by the pullers aboveground. So the moral of the story is....The biggest help may come from someone unseen. Or, alternatively, two groups may be working on the same problem, unaware of one another. Look around you. Look around your community, where can you help? Who is helping you? Right here in this room, the person next to you may be your biggest help. Thank them, and thank you.