

**Early Literacy Practices of New Zealand Children's
Librarians in Storytimes**

by

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Submitted to the School of Information Management,
Victoria University of Wellington
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Information Studies

November 2017

ABSTRACT

Research problem: Programmes such as Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) in the United States of America provide librarians with training to support and encourage the development of early literacy skills in storytime programming. Existing research into the practices of librarians delivering storytimes in New Zealand Aotearoa suggests librarians wish to distance themselves from educational environments and are at risk of compromising their own commitments to supporting literacy in the community. Strategic alignment between library programming and library goals has not been investigated in the literature. The purpose of this research was to examine the aims of storytimes and training of New Zealand librarians to establish to what extent early literacy theory/research informs their practice.

Methodology: In this qualitative study, purposive sampling was used to select 9 participants from five library networks across New Zealand Aotearoa. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, over the phone, and by email to collect data.

Results: The aims of storytimes sat on a spectrum of storytimes as recreational activities and as educational opportunities. Developing a 'love of reading' or print motivation through engaging and enjoyable storytimes was the primary aim of librarians delivering storytime programming. In addition to this, some librarians reported storytimes supported the development of select early literacy skills such as vocabulary and background knowledge, and provided caregivers with advice to support their children's early literacy development. Training was infrequent with early literacy instruction rarely mentioned. Librarians preferred training which focused on directly improving practice. Strategic plans often lacked specific goals for literacy or learning and didn't communicate the value of common library goals such as supporting lifelong learning.

Implications: The findings of this study will be of interest to librarians delivering storytimes in New Zealand. The results can serve as a guide for the development of storytime training, including early literacy-based training utilising ECRR and *Te Whāriki*.

Keywords: Early literacy, preschool storytime, public libraries, strategic alignment, professional development, peer-coaching, storytelling.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Anne Goulding for kindling my interest in this subject and for all of her advice and support throughout the duration of this research project.

A big thank-you is owed to the participants of this study who took time out of their busy days to meet with me, take phone calls, and answer emails. This project wouldn't have been possible without your contributions.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Trustees of the National Library for their financial support by awarding me the Hector Macaskill Memorial Scholarship in Children's Librarianship.

I am deeply grateful to my family for supporting and encouraging me throughout my many years of study. Thanks for always believing in me.

I am so thankful to my boyfriend Sam for his support, kindness, and patience throughout this year.

Finally, thank-you to my coaches and colleagues at Wellington City Libraries for their kind words and interest in my project.

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1 TOPIC STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which early literacy research/theory informs the practice of selected librarians running preschool¹ storytime programming in chosen New Zealand Aotearoa public library networks.

Ghoting and Martin-Díaz define early literacy as “what children know about reading and writing before they actually learn to read and write” (2006, p. 6). According to research conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), early literacy consists of six skills that provide the foundation for strong reading skills: print motivation, phonological awareness, vocabulary, narrative skills, print awareness, and letter knowledge (Ghoting & Martin-Díaz, 2006, pp. 3–4). These skills inform the literacy project Every Child Ready to Read @ your library (ECRR). Following a 2010 review by Susan Neuman and Donna Celano, a second edition of ECRR was formed which focuses on a framework of five practices – singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing – and six early literacy skills: oral language; vocabulary; background knowledge; print awareness; letter knowledge; and phonological awareness (Campana, Mills, Capps, et al., 2016, p. 371; Ghoting & Klatt, 2014, Chapter Language and Literacy Development).

The Ministry of Education of New Zealand Aotearoa confirms the important role that books and stories occupy in child development through the ‘Communication – Mana Reo’ strand of New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum *Te Whākiri* (Ministry of Education, 2006). In addition to this, they provide examples of book and storytelling-based play to be used by early childhood education providers (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Pratt et al. (2016, p. 69) state that when families are actively involved in their children’s early education, parents/caregivers (from this forward referred to as caregivers) develop the knowledge and skills to support their children’s academic and socio-emotional development. This positively impacts the children’s school readiness and overall wellbeing (Pratt et al., 2016, pp. 89–70). Public libraries are an ideal place for the development and implementation of programmes delivering early literacy resources and strategies to families

¹ New Zealand libraries offer many early childhood programmes for children from birth to school entry. For this study, the focus will be on programmes targeting or attending by children in the three to five-year-old bracket.

as they are accessible and affordable, and their policy of inclusivity creates a safe and trusting community space (Barratt-Pugh, Anderson, & North, 2013; Pratt et al., 2016).

These programmes often take the form of preschool storytimes. Storytimes feature not only stories read by librarians but also action rhymes, songs and music, and play (Goulding, Dickie, Shuker, & Bennett, 2014, p. 2). Early-literacy based programmes are occurring internationally, such as the Australian family literacy programmes described by Barratt-Pugh et al. (2013) and ECRR as discussed by Ghoting and Martin-Díaz (2006) and Ghoting and Klatt (2014).

Despite this basis for confirming and enhancing the value of library preschool storytimes, a recent study into storytimes in New Zealand public libraries suggests that some librarians wish to distance the library space from early childhood education environments (Goulding, Dickie, Shuker, & Bennett, 2014, p. 9) and are failing to recognise their role “in community-based literacy development” (Goulding et al., 2014, p. 1). Few librarians interviewed by Goulding et al. (2014, pp. 9–10) considered how their library programming related to *Te Whākiri*.

Early literacy has been at the centre of the theories driving the practice of storytimes since libraries began offering the service in the mid twentieth century (Albright, Delecki, & Hinkle, 2009). Developmentally appropriate techniques have been evident in the storytime practices of librarians since the 1950s (Albright et al., 2009, p. 14). However, the creation of storytimes which educate caregivers and support children’s literacy development rests on the librarian’s ability to understand their practice and to *intentionally* develop programming which communicates the importance of this practice to caregivers (Albright et al., 2009, p. 15).

Pratt et al. (2016, p. 75) rightfully point out that librarians are not experts in child development and parenting, and require ongoing training and support to communicate this knowledge in a storytime setting to participants. While programmes like ECRR offer workshops and training material to North American librarians, it is unclear what training and support is undertaken by New Zealand librarians involved in storytime programming.

The librarians of Goulding et al.’s (2014) study wished to distance their practice from that of early education providers; in doing so, they may be inadvertently undermining their

library's commitment to literacy in the community. Libraries frequently make commitments to their community in the form of a strategic plan. Storytimes, like those discussed above, position libraries as providers of early learning resources and experiences in their communities. It remains unexplored if the practices of librarians providing storytimes are in alignment with the goals of their institution. This project will address these gaps in the literature.

1.1 IMPLICATIONS

This project will build on the research by Goulding et al. (2014) by investigating what New Zealand librarians' practice in storytimes and what early literacy approach, if any, New Zealand public libraries take towards the development and running of these programmes across their branches. Additionally, it will determine what support or training is currently offered to librarians involved in storytime, what support or training is desired, and how existing early literacy programmes have been implemented in a New Zealand context.

The results of this study will be beneficial in establishing librarians' perception of their role in early literacy development and their alignment with the stated policies of their libraries. Overall, this will allow libraries and related organisations to evaluate the strategic direction of storytimes, and the training and support they offer staff.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which early literacy research/theory informs the practice of selected librarians running preschool storytime programming in chosen New Zealand public library networks.

It will address the following research questions:

- What are the storytime programme's aims or desired outcomes?
 - How do these aims or desired outcomes align with the institution's strategic plan?
- What types of training have been undertaken by librarians delivering storytimes to contribute to the programme's aims?
- What are the perceptions of librarians regarding their role in the development of early literacy skills?

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed as background for this study suggested that while many librarians demonstrate some early literacy practices, many librarians and caregivers perceive the central aim of storytimes as an opportunity to develop a 'love of reading' and school readiness. The literature also revealed that surveyed librarians lacked formal education in children's early literacy development. There is a growing body of resources available internationally for librarians looking to develop early literacy-based programming. Finally, the literature indicates that the acquisition of early literacy skills is fundamental for the development of reading skills and libraries have the potential to become advocates for children's literacy in their community.

3.1 STORYTIME AIMS

Peterson (2012, sec. Abstract) looked at the perspectives and practices of librarians at ten Ontario library preschool literacy programs in order to determine how they support early literacy and school readiness amongst the attendees, as well as interactions between these attendees and their caregivers. Research aims included determining the goals library staff and caregivers have for the program, caregivers' perspectives of the programmes, and identifying early literacy behaviour in the programme. Peterson (2012, p. 6) found that school readiness "was parents'/caregivers' predominant desired outcome for their children's participation in the library program" and librarians and caregivers held the shared belief that "a love of reading and engaging with books was [an] important skill" for the children to develop.

Goulding et al. (2014) received a similar response from New Zealand librarians. They interviewed librarians involved in storytimes and observed their sessions to determine their contribution to the development of early literacy skills. Although several early literacy skills were observed in sessions, the development of print motivation was found to be the central focus of storytimes as librarians expressed a desire to engage children with literature and the library space (Goulding et al., 2014, p. 9)^[AH1].

Carroll (2015) investigated the book selection practices for storytimes at Auckland City Libraries. She found that although some librarians were interested in developing literacy or

school readiness and “explicitly connected educational outcomes with their book selection practices”, the driving aim of the storytime programming remained promoting a love of reading (Carroll, 2015, p. 44).

The literature indicates that the perceived purpose of storytime programming for librarians developing the programme, and for the caregivers of participants, is creating a ‘love for reading’ and supporting school readiness.

In a study of children’s programmes for public libraries and/or community groups, McKenzie and Stooke (2012) found that purpose had a significant impact on the success of the programme. Tensions could result where the purpose for attending differed between the participant and the librarians. McKenzie and Stooke observed programme sessions where participants failed to engage with the programme’s objectives or librarians directly or indirectly excluded participants (2012, p. 50). It is necessary for librarians to have a clear idea of the purpose of the programme in order to connect it to the community and to demonstrate its impact to stakeholders (McKenzie & Stooke, 2012, p. 49).

Purpose - or objective - is an essential element of planning and evaluation. Rankin (2015) introduces project planning by tying it to organisational planning and the manager’s roles in ensuring the objectives of the organisation are met. As well as discussing the impact and evaluation of projects, Rankin (2015, pp. 311–316) discusses the need for early years librarians to attend to their personal development and adopt reflective practice. She argues that reflection is a central part of professionalism and improves practice by encouraging the practitioner to think critically and engage in research (Rankin, 2015, p. 312).

3.2 STORYTIME TRAINING

Martinez (2007) aimed to determine how librarians were conducting storytimes, what outreach they were provided, and how training sessions and resources provided by John Hopkins University impacted their practice. A combination of interviews, observations, and document collection were used. Martinez (2007, p. 37) found that the training “provided them with research-based activities that they could readily incorporate in their storytimes” and helped librarians “understand the connection between their library services and young children’s school readiness”. The study also found that the librarians had never received

training in kindergarten expectations and staff desired more professional development opportunities in the area of child development and learning (Martinez, 2007, pp. 37–38).

Martinez' (2007) findings are comparable with that of Carroll (2015). Interviews with Auckland City Libraries' staff revealed that they had received no formal training in the area of early literacy (Carroll, 2015, p. 48). Interestingly, the majority of her respondents held or were completing postgraduate and undergraduate qualifications in Information Studies; this suggests that current qualifications in New Zealand are not adequately preparing librarians for work in early literacy (Carroll, 2015, p. 20). Campana et al. (2016, p. 383) similarly found that American storytime providers, despite holding postgraduate qualifications in Information Studies, lacked training in the areas of child development and early literacy, thus leaving them without the knowledge to incorporate early literacy skills and support their development during storytimes.

Researchers in the Library Studies field have investigated best practices for storytimes and made recommendations for libraries looking to develop early literacy programming. In 2010, McKend developed a framework of best practices for supporting the planning, development, and delivery of effective programming for preschoolers in Canada. McKend's (2010) report conducted a literature review of existing best practices followed by interviews with library staff about delivering programs. She found that elements of the American Library Association's program ECRR were formally or informally adopted in the majority of libraries consulted (McKend, 2010, p. 16). Her final recommendations centred on the adoption of and support of ECRR as best practice for storytimes (McKend, 2010, pp. 19–20).

Campbell-Hicks (2016) identified key concepts for the development of early literacy programmes in public libraries. Campbell-Hicks (2016) toured overseas libraries and agencies to learn about practices that could be implemented in Australia to improve early literacy skills. Both McKend and Campbell-Hicks highlight the importance of adapting early literacy programmes to the individual community (Campbell-Hicks, 2016, p. 128; McKend, 2010, p. 20).

The published evaluations of the Australian family literacy programme *Better Beginnings* provide insight into the ongoing needs of librarians and participants involved in early literacy-based programming. Developed by the State Library of Western Australia,

Better Beginnings draws on research that “[suggests] that literacy begins as the baby is inducted into family and community literacy events” (Barratt-Pugh & Allen, 2011, p. 196) and involves “strong cooperation between health professionals and public libraries” (Barratt-Pugh & Allen, 2011, p. 197). The aims of the evaluation were to determine what impact *Better Beginnings* was having on parent/caregiver book sharing practices and beliefs about early reading (Barratt-Pugh & Allen, 2011, p. 197). Responses indicated that guidance for book selection and book-sharing was perceived as valuable by caregivers. However, the need for “advice about ways of supporting ongoing literacy development” was identified as a key issue by mothers (Barratt-Pugh & Allen, 2011, p. 202).

Several books have been published which discuss how early literacy research enhances storytimes and offers practical support to storytime providers looking to incorporate this research into their practice. *Early literacy storytimes @ your library* (Ghoting & Martin-Díaz, 2006) is based on the research of the ECRR initiative. *STEP into Storytime* (Ghoting & Klatt, 2014) introduces StoryTime Effective Practice (STEP), an approach which connects child development theory to storytimes. This approach emphasises developing programming which supports children’s emotional and social, cognitive, physical, and language and development. *Supercharged Storytimes* (Campana, Mills, & Ghoting, 2016) draws on research from Project VIEWS2 (Valuable Initiatives in Early Learning that Work Successfully) and the practices of ECRR. Like *STEP into Storytimes*, it outlines practices for incorporating early literacy behaviours into storytimes and offers storytime providers a toolkit for planning and assessment.

Assessment is a means to understanding the “impact and effectiveness of...storytimes” and allows staff to understand, advocate for, and improve their practices (Campana, Mills, & Ghoting, 2016, pp. 108–109). *Supercharged Storytimes* features two chapters detailing the models of self-reflection and peer-mentoring that arose from research conducted as part of Project VIEWS2. Self-reflection and peer-mentoring enable staff to assess, improve, and share their work. Campana et al. (2016, Chapter The Big Picture) argue that assessment fits into outcome-based processes, enabling librarians to link their storytime planning and delivery to observed outcomes. This in turn allows librarians to advocate for their work and its impact, especially when budget constraints and leadership changes shift the institution’s priorities (Campana, Mills, & Ghoting, 2016, p. 131).

These three texts draw upon the research and work of ECRR, a parent education initiative developed through partnerships between the Public Library Association (American Library Association), NICHD, and Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC). ECRR argues that public libraries can have a greater impact on children's early literacy by focusing on educating parents and caregivers on the importance of early literacy skills and by providing them with the skills and knowledge to support their child's early literacy development (Public Library Association & Association for Library Service to Children, n.d.). Similarly, *Better Beginnings* is built upon the premise that libraries can support the development of children's early literacy by educating and supporting their parents and caregivers. To accomplish this, however, librarians must possess those skills and knowledge themselves. Texts like those discussed above target that knowledge gap and provide tools for developing and improving their storytime practices.

3.3 STORYTIME OUTCOMES

Elkin (2014) and Rankin (2016) discuss the importance of the early years for development of literacy and social skills as indicated in current research. Both articles are situated in the context of cuts to public library services in the United Kingdom. Elkin and Rankin argue that libraries provide valuable support to families of young children regarding their development. Rankin (2016, p. 15) suggests that public libraries tie themselves to policies and agencies relating to early education in order to ensure the value of libraries' early childhood services are understood by policymakers.

Goulding et al. (2014) argued that New Zealand library services concerned about demonstrating their impact on their communities and the value they add to early childhood education should consider how their programming fits within *Te Whāriki* (p. 9). Although observed programming reflected specific strands of *Te Whāriki*, few librarians interviewed by Goulding et al. considered how the New Zealand early education curriculum *Te Whāriki* related to their practice (2014, p. 9). Goulding et al. (2014, p. 10) suggests that a "clearer articulation of the relationship" between library services and *Te Whāriki* "could help position public libraries as...key [players] in community-based literacy initiatives". There is also the added possibility of using this relationship and arguments such as Rankin's (2016)

and Elvin's (2014) to place the library in strategic alignment with their parent institution and safeguard funding.

However, Blaiklock (2011), McLachlan and Arrow (2013), and Westerveld et al. (2015) all find fault with *Te Whāriki*. As a holistic curriculum, *Te Whāriki* provides little guidance for the development of early literacy skills (Blaiklock, 2011; Westerveld, Gillon, Bysterveldt, & Boyd, 2015). Early childhood education (ECE) professionals in McLachlan and Arrow's (2013, p. 835) study did not comment on the use for *Te Whāriki* for literacy planning and, worryingly, the qualified teachers in this study had limited understanding of phonological awareness.

Westerveld et al. (2015, p. 348) assessed the early literacy skills of four-year-old children and their home literacy environment and found that "it is the parents' input rather than the kindergarten experience that may promote the children's letter name knowledge" and children who were read to at an early age by their parents "showed better performance on measures of phonological awareness and name writing". This supports Pratt et al.'s (2016) claims that family involvement in early education outside of formal ECE settings has an positive impact on children's academic progress. New Zealand libraries can draw upon the findings of Westerveld et al. (2015) and Pratt et al. (2016) to create a space that supports family involvement in early literacy development.

These articles indicate that *Te Whāriki* may be of little use to the development of early literacy activities in libraries and that formal ECE in New Zealand cannot be relied upon as the only source of literacy learning. However, a study by Zhang (2017) into how parents' approaches to early literacy align with *Te Whāriki* suggests that the curriculum can still support the development of early literacy skills.

Zhang (2017) acknowledges the findings of Blaiklock (2011) and McLachlan and Arrow (2011) and suggests that the sociocultural nature of *Te Whāriki* prescribes the creation of early literacy programmes between parents and teachers through co-construction. Zhang (2017, p. 82) found parents' beliefs and practices regarding early literacy skills were consistent with the Learning Outcomes of Goal 3 of the Communication Strand. However, the emphasis on early literacy skills for school readiness – such as name/letter recognition and writing, and reading by the child – by parents was largely unspecified by *Te Whāriki*

(Zhang, 2017, p. 84). As the Learning Outcomes are inclusive, these skills can be mapped to them. The alignment between parents and *Te Whāriki* on early literacy skills suggests that parents and teachers can work together to develop an early literacy programme in alignment with *Te Whāriki*.

Campana et al. (2016) investigated whether an early literacy focus for public library storytimes made a difference in the early literacy skills of the children who attended the programmes. Using the Benchmarks Curricular Planning and Assessment Framework (BCPAF) and Program Evaluation Tool (PET) as tools, they assessed the early literacy content and observed early literacy behaviour at 120 public library storytimes. Both tools were effective for assessing storytimes and revealed that “when storytime providers offer early literacy content, corresponding early literacy behaviours can be observed in the children” (Campana, Mills, Capps, et al., 2016, p. 382). This demonstrates that storytimes do have an impact on the acquisition of early literacy skills.

The acquisition of early literacy skills in the preschool period is crucial for the later development of reading skills. Lonigan et al. (2000) conducted a longitudinal study of two groups of preschoolers to examine the nature of preschool emergent literacy, as well as the predictive significance of emergent literacy skills for later reading. Their results indicate that “the developmental origins of a large component of children’s reading skills in kindergarten and first grade can be found in the preschool period” (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000, p. 606) with phonological sensitivity and letter knowledge accounting for 54% of the variance in decoding abilities (2000, p. 606). A longitudinal study conducted in New Zealand by Tunmer, Chapman, and Prochnow (2006) similarly found that acquisition of early literacy skills made a significant impact on later reading comprehension. Discussion of research into the acquisition of early literacy skills and its impact on reading can be found in New Zealand literature relating to early childhood education such as Arrow (2010), McLachlan & Arrow (2013), and Westerveld et al. (2015).

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The chosen research design is a *phenomenological study* which Leedy & Ormrod defines as a study “that attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of particular situation” (2013, p. 145). Researchers undertaking a phenomenological study typically conduct interviews with a selected sample of participants; this was the primary method of data collection in this research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 145).

4.2 RESEARCH SAMPLE

The method is based upon those described in similar studies into perceptions of early literacy programming. Purposive sampling was used by Barratt-Pugh & Allen (2011), Martinez (2007), Peterson (2012), and McKend (2010) with a focus on seeking respondents from rural, urban, and suburban communities. In addition, Martinez (2007) considered the socioeconomic status of the library’s community when seeking respondents as “to represent diverse populations...and to present balance...” (2007, p. 35) and to counteract the limitations of the small sample size (2007, p. 38).

The researcher compiled a list of public libraries in New Zealand which stated they held storytime programming. Invitations to participate in the research were sent to the library managers of several City Council and District Council library networks. Attempts were made to recruit from participants from networks which used language related to literacy or child development in their descriptions of storytimes.

Three City Council networks agreed to participate; three participants each from two networks, and one from the third. One library manager from a District Council network approached the researcher via Twitter and one interview was completed from this network. The final participant, from a District Council network, volunteered after reading about the project on Twitter. In total, there were nine participants. There were three library assistants (two senior), two branch library managers, two children’s librarians, one librarian with a focus in youth services and community programmes, and a mobile/outreach librarian.

Participants reported working in a range of communities, with some identifying the communities they deliver storytimes in as low socio-economic. Some of the participants at the City Council networks worked at the central library but were primarily based in branches in small towns or suburbs. Perspectives of rural librarians was largely uncaptured; only the mobile/outreach librarian reported visiting rural communities to deliver storytimes.

The majority of participants presented storytimes regularly in the library. Two participants delivered storytimes as part of outreach, and a third presented storytimes at the library to visiting classes. The research attempted to focus on storytimes attended by children aged three to five but several of the librarians reported infants attending their sessions.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

Surveys and/or semi-structured interviews were the chosen data collection method in the studies conducted by Barratt-Pugh et. al (2013), Martinez (2007), Carroll (2015) and Goulding et. al (2014). Semi-structured interviews permit the exploration of perspectives and beliefs, complex issues, and can capture privileged information (Denscombe, 2004, p. 186). Semi-structured interviews also include focused questions and some structure to ensure that necessary information is collected across all interviews (Martinez, 2007, p. 36).

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone, and via email. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face due to staff availability and location of the branches. Three interviews took place by telephone. Four interviews occurred by email as they were less time-consuming for the participants.

Email interviews can obtain data of similar richness and quality as that from face-to-face interviews; participants have more time to formulate their responses and reflect upon them, and other more personal data as result (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014, p. 454). Ratislavová & Ratislav (2014) recommend providing follow-up questions to participants' responses to obtain rich data; establishing a timeline with participants for responses; and offering the participants detailed information about the researcher and project to build a relationship. The interview questions were separated into three sections. When one section of questions was completed by the participant, the next set of questions and follow-up questions were emailed to the participant.

Librarians and their organisation were asked, where possible, to provide documents relating to early literacy training and the development of the programme, as well as promotional materials (print or digital) and the library's strategic plan. Pamphlets were collected from the branches of the face-to-face interviews. Some strategic plans and promotional material were provided by managerial staff, whereas others were sourced online.

Martinez (2007) gathered documentary sources to confirm the information given by interviewees regarding their activities, as well as revealing any activities not mentioned during the interviews (p. 37). A comparison between official library documents and statements made by participating librarians indicates how closely staff beliefs and practices align with those of their library.

4.3.1 Limitations

Due to the sample size, the data will not be wholly representative of the beliefs and practices of librarians across New Zealand. However, purposive sampling provides data regarding the range of practices and beliefs of librarians working in various library networks and types of communities.

The chosen method of data collection – semi-structured interviews – relied on self-reporting. Self-reported data is not always accurate; human memory is not infallible and the interview asked people to recall and discuss past events such as training (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 153). Self-reported data can be intentionally dishonest; Denscombe (2004, p. 190) warns interviewers that “what people say they do, what they say they prefer and what they say they think cannot automatically be assumed to reflect the truth”. The act of being recorded can also inhibit some interviewees (Denscombe, 2004, p. 190). Two interviewees were reluctant to clarify statements, including one disagreeing with their library's training. Although confidentiality was guaranteed, interviewees knew their managers were aware of the research and were perhaps reluctant to openly and honestly discuss negative opinions about their library.

Asynchronous email interviews have some limitations in comparison to face-to-face interviews and phone interviews such as the loss of nonverbal and paralinguistic cues (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014, p. 459). The emotions of the participant and their degree of

comfort with the interview questions can be lost during an email interview. Similarly, the interviewer cannot provide the participant with nonverbal cues which support the participants' discussion of the topic (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014, p. 458). Although participants were provided with timelines, email interviews did take over a week to complete. Participants reported illness and rostered time away from a computer as impacting their ability to respond to the emails.

Participants who completed the interviews by email had more time to formulate and reflect upon their responses compared to those who were interviewed over the phone. One participant directly quoted her library's strategic plan. Similarly, one participant who was interviewed over the phone reported she had prepared for the interview by writing notes and had sought out her library's strategic plan. Transcripts of face-to-face and phone interviews were provided and some participants did use this as opportunity to amend or clarify points they had made.

The varying types of interviews likely impacted the responses. Face-to-face interviews enable the researcher to build a rapport with the interviewee which encourages cooperation and honesty (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 190). Although telephone and email interviews allow the researcher to interview geographically distant participants, it is more difficult to build a rapport with the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 190; Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014, p. 458). The researcher attempted to combat this by offering personal information about herself and encouraging the interviewees to ask any questions of their own.

4.4 ETHICS APPROVAL

Victoria University of Wellington granted ethics approval via the School of Information Management's Human Ethics Committee. An information sheet informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study and guaranteed confidentiality. The information sheet also outlined the purpose of the study and, broadly, the topics of discussion.

As participants were discussing the organisation they currently work for, authorisation was sought from senior management of the library network (Denscombe, 2004, p. 185). Senior management received an information sheet outlining the research project. Eight participants volunteered after being informed of the research by their senior manager. One

participant volunteered after learning about the research on Twitter. All participants received the information sheet and signed a consent form. Where interviews were conducted face-to-face or over the phone, participants agreed to being audio recorded and were provided with transcripts of the interview.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

In a phenomenological study, common themes are identified in order to provide an overall description of an experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 146). The researcher reviewed the interview transcripts, identifying prominent and recurring themes. Divergent perspectives were also considered in order to recognise the diversity of librarians' storytime experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 146). The common themes were then related back to the research questions [AG2] (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 146). The analysis utilised a mixture of inductive and deductive reasoning to draw a conclusion from the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, pp. 17–19).

Two library networks volunteered three librarians each to take part in the research. This allowed for the librarians' responses to be compared within and between the library networks. This comparison captured similarities and differences in practices and opinions within an organisation. Although the responses of the three remaining participants could not be compared to ascertain similarity and differences within the network, the data did provide insight into training, and perceptions towards storytime programming and early literacy across New Zealand libraries.

4.5.1 Limitations

One of the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews is that “the researcher gets different information from different people and thus may not be able to compare the responses of various interviewees” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 154). Participants were asked a series of similar questions but as they were open-ended, interpretations and, therefore responses, varied. In a semi-structured interview, these responses are then explored with “individually tailored” follow-up questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 190). It became apparent in the transcription of the telephone and face-to-face interviews that some points received more clarification than others. One advantage of email interviews was the ability to

ask multiple follow-up questions and receive multiple answers without ‘disrupting the flow of conversation’.

5 RESULTS

The interviews revealed a number of themes relating to the aims of storytimes; the training received or undertaken by children’s librarians; and the perceptions of librarians regarding their role in the development of early literacy skills. The following sections discuss these findings.

5.1 STORYTIME AIMS

What are the storytime programme’s aims or desired outcomes?

5.1.1 The Love and Joy of Reading

Sharing and fostering a love or joy of reading/books was a phrase used by four of the interviewees to describe their storytime aims. Goulding et al. (2014, p. 3) reported the use of this phrasing in statements of storytime aims and found it was indicative of librarians encouraging print motivation. Print motivation is “being interested in and enjoying books and reading” (Goulding et al., 2014, p. 3). Enjoyment of books and reading motivates children to continue engaging with literature. Encouraging print motivation through the sharing of a love of reading was evident in the responses of participants in this research:

“Our role is to just do what we do best which is just love books and show you^[AH3]^[AG4] how to love them as well...It’s all about making it so appealing that you just, it’s just something you need as much as air and food and hugs...”

Promoting and fostering a love of reading was crucial to ensuring children engaged with literature. One librarian, when asked to clarify the importance of promoting the joy of reading, said: “People are more likely to do something again, and again if they find it fun!”

This librarian, working in outreach, also connected print motivation to the development of a long-term relationship with the library, stating “a love of literature creates a lifetime learner/reader and hopefully an enduring relationship with the Library”. Similarly,

another librarian connected a love of reading to the development of early literacy skills such as vocabulary, and school readiness. Print motivation was seen as a pathway to supporting learning.

5.1.2 Having Fun – A Recreation Focus

While all of the interviewees reported the aim of storytimes was to introduce young children to books and to reading through the act of reading aloud, their responses fell on a spectrum between storytimes as a recreational activity and storytimes as an educational opportunity.

The responses of librarians at one network revealed a tension between storytimes as a recreational activity and storytimes as an educational opportunity. The common themes for their aims were fun, enjoyment, and relaxation. One librarian aimed to develop print motivation by making reading “seem like a heap of fun” and “appealing”. She explicitly rejected storytimes as educational opportunities, stating “we’re recreational focused so we’re not here to tick all the same boxes that you would if you were say a preschool teacher or a primary school teacher”. Her colleague similarly aimed to present reading in a relaxing and fun context, explaining that many caregivers felt “pressured” to develop their children’s literacy and had their own anxieties around learning to read. Her storytimes presented reading as “exciting and encouraged but not pressured”. Educational elements were seen as detracting from the enjoyment and engagement necessary to achieve print motivation.

5.1.3 Enjoyable and Educational – An Educational Focus

At the second network, the aim was to create a balance between recreation and education. The three all desired to create an enjoyable experience for the children. Additionally, they also reported that the aim of storytimes was to help with language development and reading skills; background knowledge (such as letters, colours, and numbers); school readiness; and to demonstrate to caregivers that “reading together can be enjoyable and educational”. Development of select early literacy skills were aims of storytimes.

For two librarians, storytimes was an educational opportunity for both children and caregivers. They reported aiming to support caregivers to develop their children’s early literacy. One stated that she “[strove] to include an educational side” to her storytimes

through the addition of literacy asides to caregivers, books which introduced new concepts, and the use of craft activities. The other librarian referred to the literacy outcomes of her library's strategic plan, stating that the aim of storytimes was "to encourage the development of literacy skills, particularly reading" and to "provide advice and support to parents and caregivers on literacy and reading development". Enjoyment of reading was not absent from the storytime aims of these librarians, but there was a heavier emphasis on utilising storytimes as an educational opportunity for all attendees.

5.1.4 Library as Place

The library as place was a theme identified in the storytime aims of some of the participants. Comfort within the physical library space was seen by some librarians as part of building a positive relationship between the library and attendees, leading into use of library services. One librarian, who primarily held storytimes for visiting preschool classes, wanted the children to "feel comfortable in the space and want to access the library" outside of the class visits. The aim was to create an atmosphere which ensured attendees would want to return and utilise the library services.

The library as place was a prominent aim of storytimes for one librarian. Alongside her aim on developing a 'love of reading' was the concept of 'library life'. The librarian described the library as "about all the people and stories in it" and as a space of lifelong learning and community connection. She aimed to make "children part of library life" and for the library to be as "an essential institution in their life" as schools or social clubs like sports teams. Storytime was seen as an aspect of creating a sense of community within the library. Although the other librarians from this network did not directly refer to this concept, they also described their storytimes as a social or recreational occasion and described children growing up and socialising within the library space.

The theme of adult socialising emerged in the response from one librarian. Like her colleagues, her primary aim was for the children to enjoy the session but she also stated her goal was "so the mums have somewhere to come". She described leaving them "to their own devices" after the session so that they could "build a rapport" with one another. The attending mothers would leave the session together to visit a nearby café.

In contrast librarians who delivered storytimes in the community as part of outreach services separated library services from the physical space. The focus was on bringing the library services – such as the collection and storytimes – to those who couldn't visit the library due to geographical isolation or to those who might not normally visit the library. One outreach librarian described visiting lower socio-economic areas where children were likely to have a low home literacy environment and may never visit a library with their family. Storytimes by book bus were described as a way of bringing storytimes to lower socio-economic areas lacking branch libraries.

5.1.5 Improving Statistics as Aim

Circulating items, creating library members, and bringing people into the library were described by some of the librarians as part of the aim of storytimes. One librarian, when asked for the goal of her storytime, said:

“The library’s very interested in how many children come to the storytimes so we keep statistics for that. My main goal is to get them to come into the library and to come to our storytimes.”^[AG5]

The number of the participants and the borrowing of books read in the session were also reported as measures of the sessions success. One librarian reported her regular storytime sessions had been cancelled due to falling attendance while another reported she lost attendees *en masse* when they enrolled in preschool. Another specifically used attendance to evaluate her practice, stating that low numbers make her feel that she's done “something wrong”. Many of the interviewees reported being unable to accurately predict the number of attendees for each session, suggesting consistent attendance from a core group can be a difficult goal to achieve. Librarians did link circulation of materials to the wider aim of encouraging shared-reading and engagement with literature.^[AG6]

5.2 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

How do these aims or desired outcomes align with the institution’s strategic plan?

This section compares the participants’ responses regarding storytime aims to the strategic plans and storytime marketing materials of their libraries. Of the five libraries, two had stand-alone strategic plans, two featured in their Council’s strategic plans, and one was

in the process of developing a new strategic plan. Where the strategic plan lacked specific outcomes or goals related to literacy, staff struggled to identify a library vision for children's literacy and relate it to storytimes.

One of the librarians interviewed held a leadership role and was involved in the process of developing the strategic plan. She felt that the library's vision would be the concept of library life – the life as a central community and social space within an individual's life - and “channelling the best library services to the children of today to help them become the well-rounded adults of tomorrow”. Although there was no stated library vision, the other librarians interviewed from this network similarly described their storytimes as recreational and low-pressure, and gave examples of children who regularly attended the library throughout their childhood for programming or borrowing materials. However one did acknowledge that the library didn't have a vision and stated she was deferring to her personal storytime aims.

The promotional description of the storytime sessions was identical across all branches. It captured the focus on print motivation, describing the sessions as fun and developing a love of reading. At the two of the branches, pamphlets were available describing tips for dialogic reading. Although the pamphlets did not explicitly refer to early literacy skills, they described behaviours which develop print awareness – reading the title, author, and illustrator of a book – and narrative skills – asking children to predict what will happen in the story. One pamphlet specifically identified the developmental benefits of reading and its descriptions of the importance of reading with your child and bringing them to the library emphasised the development of a high home-literacy environment. The same level of emphasis on the importance of dialogic reading was absent from the descriptions of storytime aims at this library.

The second network had a stand-alone strategic plan, beginning last year. In the section on learning, the plan states that public consultation emphasised the importance of developing and supporting literacy in children and young people. Despite this, there was no specific goal for children's literacy. Instead, supporting and advising parents on reading choices was listed as a possible action for a goal relating to developing learning opportunities. Staff at this network focused on different listed actions, such as outreach, struggled to find or recall a relevant goal, and referred to a separate policy for supporting

educational institutions and lifelong learning. Staff were unable to relate the strategic plan to their storytime practice but did describe supporting parents on reading choices by providing reader's advisory following the storytime sessions.

The policy referred to, although not relevant to storytimes, did explicitly outline the library's role in supporting and developing educational achievement in children and young people. This policy was tied to outcomes in the Council's strategic plan, unlike the library's strategic plan, and referred to the Public Libraries of New Zealand strategic framework and the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto.

Promotional material for storytimes at this network contained a very brief description of the session, focusing on fun and enjoyment. It did not reflect the staff or the library's goals to provide learning opportunities through developing early literacy skills.

Of the three remaining three librarians [AG7] interviewed, one referred extensively to her library's strategic plan throughout the interview. This library had a specific goal for children's literacy – "Libraries support literacy and promote reader development" – with stimulating literacy-based learning in children as an objective. While reflecting on some recent literacy-based training, she reported that it made her feel that the library was "on the right track" by providing literacy-based programming. Storytimes were an opportunity for supporting and advising parents on literacy development. She reported that the library's objectives "embody what Storytime is all about and should be about". The description of storytimes on the library website emphasised the literacy-focus, stating that it fosters literacy and helps with child development. This was the strongest case of strategic alignment.

The other two libraries did not have a stand-alone strategic plan, instead featuring in their Council's strategic plan. The first described developing programmes for development and education; the library's mission statement similarly described creating opportunities for learning alongside connection and creativity. The librarian interviewed from this library gave her storytime aim and the library's vision as fostering a love of reading as well community engagement and provision of books. Without more specific library goals, strategic alignment is unexpected. The Council plan for the other library was more specific. It argued libraries contribute to Council outcomes relating to economy and vibrant/healthy communities. This

was the only plan to suggest the wider community benefits of library use and lifelong learning. The librarian interviewed correctly described the library's vision and, as a mobile librarian, emphasised his role in providing access to materials and supporting lifelong learning through promotion of literacy during storytimes. As both of these librarians delivered storytimes in the form of class visits or special events, their given aims cannot be compared to the descriptions of in-library storytime sessions online.

The librarians described their library's vision as similar to their own aims suggesting they believe their practice is in alignment with their library. The goals often lacked specificity towards literacy and storytimes but did include a variety of the librarians' activities. Although the plans used terms like 'learning opportunities' and 'lifelong learning', only one communicated the larger community benefits.

5.3 TRAINING

What types of training have been undertaken by librarians delivering storytimes to contribute to the programme's aims?

Only two interviewees stated they didn't have any formal qualifications which prepared them for storytimes. Of the interviewees who reported they had formal qualifications, all held the Open Polytechnic diploma in Library Studies and/or the Certificate in Literature and Library Services for Children and Young People². In addition to this, two stated they had Bachelor degrees in other areas – Teaching, Social Services, and English Literature – and one was working on a diploma in Communication Studies.

When describing their formal qualifications, the theme of experience versus theory emerged. The librarians differentiated their formal qualifications from what they had learnt through experience or 'doing'. One explicitly stated that the Open Polytechnic qualification only gave her the theory while another felt that the qualification didn't focus on storytimes at all. She did acknowledge that it made her aware of the stages of child development but couldn't state how it had changed her practice: "I'm not sure what I would have been like if I hadn't done it". She felt that experience had a larger impact on practice. This was reiterated

² The courses offered as part of the Certificate in Literature and Library Services for Children and Young People will be changing in 2018

by another librarian who also held the diploma: “I feel that my Storytime ‘qualifications’ have been born out of the time I have spent reading and acting with countless children”. The experience of being a parent was also reported as a factor that enabled librarians to engage with children and provide age-appropriate resources.

One librarian did, however, link the theory of the diploma to his practice. Having little experience in the library profession, he found the diploma “filled some big holes in [his] knowledge”. The diploma provided him with the theory of child development and information on selecting age-appropriate books. He viewed the diploma as having “reinforced” what he had learnt from his experience delivering storytimes.

Training such as workshops, seminars, or conferences with storytime focused content was described as occurring infrequently. Two librarians stated that in the 10-20 years they had worked for their library, they had attended two or three training workshops. One of these librarians perceived a lack of availability of training specific to delivering storytimes. Staffing and funding restricted the attendance of training events with one librarian opting to no longer apply to attend a children’s librarianship conference as she had had her “fair share of them”. She wished more could attend as they were valuable. Time in lieu was granted to some staff for attending workshops outside of their rostered hours.

Early-literacy content in training was described rarely. One librarian had recently attended the Talking Matters summit on the development of vocabulary in early childhood. One library had hosted an event from Gecko Press which included tips for reading aloud. Some librarians recalled their Sport NZ Active Movement training for an infant music and movement programme. Training on storytime techniques and resources was more prevalent.

Although training was infrequent, it was positively received and viewed as beneficial. Some reflected on the training, describing how workshops had built up their confidence to try new techniques and change their book selection practices. Training also supported reflection on storytime aims and, in one case, justified the early literacy aims of the programme. Many of the librarians wished to attend more storytimes or workshops and identified techniques or activities they would like to learn. Observation of other storytimes, whether in libraries or by storytellers, was desired. One librarian – who had attended two or

three in her 12 years – requested more frequent training: “I feel it would be beneficial to have a session once or twice a year”

5.3.1 Storytellers

Librarians described attending workshops and performances by storytellers. Discussion of storytellers revolved around the notion that they are professionally distinct from librarians delivering storytimes. The experience of seeing storytellers and learning about storytelling-techniques was positively received and felt to be beneficial to their storytime practice. Storytellers were seen as a source of knowledge for improving storytime practices and developing new techniques. One librarian had worked extensively with storytellers from the International School of Storytellers, based in the United Kingdom, and storytellers in New Zealand to improve her practice and address issues in the delivery of storytimes at her branch. She felt storytelling was a training area underexperienced: “I think storytelling training is very important for librarians and...because it's non-academic I think a lot of people probably don't come into contact with it...”

A librarian at a different network, who had previously attended storytime workshops by Susan Dodd and Janet Channon, emphasised a difference between storytellers and librarians:

“It’s really nice to see storytellers. It’s not, librarians tend to focus on the reading but it is really interesting to see different styles of storytelling. Whether we can incorporate some of that into our own, I don’t know”

Distinguishing storytellers as ‘professionals’ was evident in the responses of two other librarians:

“I would prefer to engage with professionals (as I will call them) who make a living out of storytelling such as the likes of Katrin McMullan, and other like the NZ Guild of Storytellers.”

“When we have “professional” storytellers come in, I’ve always gone to the performance to build on what I already do”.

During this discussion of storytellers, it became evident that storytimes occurred elsewhere in the community. This was not viewed negatively; librarians were impressed by the skill of these storytellers and, in some cases, received training from them.

5.3.2 Modelling of practice

The librarians described attending workshops which involved learning new or improving on existing techniques. Other topics included audience engagement and managing behavioural issues. Addressing interruptions from children and caregivers was a common issue reported by librarians. One librarian, reflecting on workshops about puppets and book selection, said it “empowered [her] to think outside the square”. Many of the librarians requested future training in certain techniques – such as felt boards – or desired to learn about new activities or resources to improve their practice.

5.3.3 Observation and Peer-Mentoring

Observation and peer-mentoring were recurring training techniques for preparing librarians to deliver storytimes. Observation occurred both formally and informally. Librarians reported actively observing a colleague or an external storyteller in preparation for delivering their own sessions. Observation occurred informally where librarians described watching storytimes being delivered by other librarians at their branch. Staffing restricted this opportunity for observation as the librarians still had desk or other rostered duties. Staffing and timing greatly impacted the ability to observe storytime sessions at other branches in the network as librarians reported being feeling unable to request time away from work and their session running concurrently with their colleagues. Only one librarian reported feeling uncomfortable being observed by her colleagues; she felt her colleagues all had a similar routine for storytimes and hers departed from it too much.

Peer-mentoring occurred in the training of several librarians. Of the three librarians interviewed at one network, two had only begun delivering storytimes at their branches within the last six months. The pair had the opportunity to deliver storytimes together at a third branch. This relationship enabled them to share resources, gain feedback on the session, and experience a different style of delivery which provided insight into improving their own practice.

More formal peer-mentoring occurred in two other libraries where the new storytime librarian was partnered with a more experienced storytime provider:

“I started as a support person for my colleague that ran the session...This helped me gain a bit more confidence to see the difference in styles of

presenting and interacting with children...We want people to be eased into the Storytime world and buddying up with a seasoned Storytime seems to really help”

“I was paired with other Librarians who were enthusiastic about sharing the job of stories, and reading mixed with performance/fun...and eventually I worked up enough confidence to give it a go myself”.

5.3.4 Individuality

The ability to develop their own unique styles of delivering storytimes was valued by the librarians interviewed. Observation enabled staff to develop their own style by trying new things:

“I think I learnt from watching her really and then I kind of made it my own...at first I kind of did the same as her. I mean not exactly the same but I kind of did what she did but then I kind of learnt that I’ve got a different style from her and that’s fine.”

Retaining their own style and being able to adapt storytime plans – such as themed special events – was valued. However, individuality was detrimental to sharing storytime plans with colleagues as one librarian reported: “We share resources, but because we all have a different style it fits on each individual differently and often don’t (sic) use other staff’s storytime plans.” A different librarian, who praised her library’s “freedom”, remarked that staffing issues meant many librarians planned their sessions in their own time. The inability or reluctance to borrow storytime plans from colleagues impacts on the planning stages of storytime sessions.

No librarians described having to follow a set formula for storytimes. However, one librarian reported that the other librarians, who had been delivering storytimes together for a number of years, had similar routines and her own was inconsistent with it. As a result, she felt they disapproved of her sessions and was uncomfortable sharing her ideas with them.

5.4 EARLY LITERACY

Participants were asked to describe what they felt their role was in the development of early literacy. Responses were directly related to the librarian's storytime aims. The librarians which described having an explicit early literacy focus in their storytimes similarly described themselves as supporting caregivers by explaining the benefits of reading together, encouraging them to read together, and advising them on appropriate book choices.

The responses of some of the librarians placed their role in a professional context. The above librarians saw these activities as part of their professional duties, using phrasing such as "as a professional" and suggesting being an authority on children's literacy. Only one librarian explicitly opposed having a professional role in the development of early literacy and reiterated the recreational focus of her storytimes. She defined her professional role as developing a love of reading:

"I think that's our role and we're not here, I mean you get questioned every other day about "Isn't it your role to do this?" and they'll state something which is really a teacher's role or a parent's role, "No that's not our role". Our role is just to do what we do best which is just love books and show you how to love them as well and it's very recreational."

For the librarians with an educational focus – such as the development of vocabulary, school readiness, and comprehension - providing reader's advisory, developing print motivation, and supporting lifelong learning were commonly given as key aspects of their role in the development of early literacy. The librarians with a recreational focus similarly described developing print motivation and one described how she used rhymes and repetition in her storytimes.

Although many of the librarians reported delivering storytimes to visiting early childhood classes and visiting early childhood centres, no one brought up the New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*. Librarians' role in formal early education settings was a subject left unexplored in this research project. Exploring how librarians' perception of their role in early literacy aligns with the goals of early education centres and *Te Whāriki* would be a potential topic for future research.

As this research project did not include observation of the librarians' practices, it is unclear how their stated role in the development of early literacy differs from their actual practice. The librarians in this research were asked to describe their storytime sessions and discuss how they engaged both children and caregivers. Repetition and rhythm were reported as key elements of the storytime sessions; librarians repeated opening/closing songs and rhymes, and selected books and music with strong rhythm. Many of the librarians reported using musical instruments, movement, and crafts. Two librarians described having the children use props to take part in the story or rhyme being read. Goulding, Dickie, and Shuker (2017) observed storytime sessions in New Zealand public libraries and examined to what extent the six early literacy skills featured in the observed sessions. Although the librarians described practices like that observed by Goulding et al. (2017), such as engaging the children in call-and-response activities, it cannot be determined without observation how the practices reported by these librarians, in reality, support the development of early literacy skills.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 STORYTIME AIMS

As discussed in the Literature Review, developing a 'love of reading' is a common aim for storytime programming in New Zealand and overseas (Carroll, 2015; Goulding et al., 2014; Peterson, 2012). Developing early literacy skills, school readiness, and engaging children in the library space were also aims expressed by librarians (Carroll, 2015; Goulding et al., 2014). The results of this study corroborate Carroll's (2015) and Goulding et al. (2014) findings on aims related to storytimes.

The 'love of reading' or print motivation has benefits for pre-schoolers. Research suggests that there is a correlation between children's reading skill and reading motivation; children who have a positive experience with books and reading will be motivated to learn to read (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). Additional research suggests that positive attitudes towards reading and learning can act as a buffer against low home-literacy environments, and help children persevere against reading difficulties (Meng, 2015; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000). The modelling of positive reading experiences by librarians supports caregivers to

encourage and appreciate reading with their children. Pratt et al. (2016, p. 69) state that when families are actively involved in their children's early education, they develop the knowledge and skills to support their children's academic and social and mental wellbeing.

Similar to Goulding et al. (2014), some librarians in this study actively distanced their storytimes from formal education, preferring to create a purely recreational environment. Although Goulding et al. (2017, p. 209) observed librarians demonstrating early literacy practices, they often neglected skills requiring more formal instruction such as letter knowledge and print awareness. Early literacy skills can be incorporated without any loss of enjoyment. The librarians' embedding of early literacy practices in a fun programme and the use of fun activities promoting language and other literacy-related abilities reflects the play-based-learning values of *Te Whāriki* (Goulding et al., 2017, p. 209). For many of the librarians involved in this study, they felt it was possible to create an enjoyable and educational session.

The literature review established that the acquisition of early literacy skills in the preschool period is crucial for the later development of reading and writing skills (Arrow, 2010; Lonigan et al., 2000; McLachlan & Arrow, 2013; Tunmer et al., 2006; Westerveld et al., 2015). Studies such as Westerveld et al. (2015) and Pratt et al. (2016) claim family involvement in early literacy development outside of ECE settings has a positive impact on children's academic progress and wellbeing. Some librarians reported educational aims for their storytimes and encouraging parents/caregivers to read with their child.

Libraries can, and already do, model positive interactions between children and literature, and act as mentors for parents and caregivers in the development of early literacy skills. Many librarians in this study described modelling positive interactions with books and guiding caregivers' book choices. What differed between librarians was their intention to support the development of early literacy skills. Few librarians in this study reported intentionally aiming to mentor caregivers, explaining how and why shared reading benefits their children. Incorporation of intentionality alongside small changes to practice can better position librarians in their role in community-based literacy development (Goulding et al., 2017, p. 209, 2014, p. 1).

In the storytime aim responses there was a focus on the library as place, with emphasis on creating a relaxing environment and supporting socialisation and community building. Many of the librarians described building positive relationships with children and caregivers and wanting to encourage use of the library services within the library space. However, they did not describe the benefits of the use of the library space and services. Building a sense of community and supporting lifelong learning within the library space were key aspects of one librarians' 'library life' concept.

This focus on the library space is reflective of the 'third place' concept. Libraries operate as a 'third place' in our lives; the 'third place' "is a place where people choose to go outside of their work or home" (Montgomery & Miller, 2011, p. 232). The 'third place' provides a space in which people can informally gather, socialise, and build a sense of community (Montgomery & Miller, 2011, p. 232). It is a space characterised by relaxation and open conversation. Unlike other institutions such as work or school, people do not have any obligation to be there. Montgomery and Miller (2011, p. 235) state that "the library as a third place provides users the space to learn from each other and build a community of learners". Although Montgomery and Miller are discussing the 'third place' in the context of academic libraries, public libraries have long been perceived as welcoming community spaces which provide services and experiences to support learning (Pratt et al., 2016).

Public libraries have the opportunity to be *informal* learning spaces, where librarians and parents and caregivers learn from one another. A focus on storytimes as recreational does not have to be in opposition to early literacy goals. Recreational storytimes can provide learning opportunities. Stooke and McKenzie (2009) found "work related to early child development and getting "ready-to-learn" at school was embedded in seemingly inconsequential leisure activities" (Stooke & McKenzie, 2009, p. 672). Goulding et al. (2017, p. 209) states that this balance of leisure and education aligns with the sociocultural approach of *Te Whāriki*. A recreational focused storytime can still incorporate educational elements without sacrificing the librarians' values of community, socialisation, and fun.

The emphasis on community and relationship-building within libraries resonates with the community and whānau learning focus of *Te Whāriki*. Zhang (2017, p. 74) suggests that this focus or 'community of practice' permits educators, children and their caregivers to co-construct literacy programmes suited to their community and cultural needs. There is the

opportunity for libraries to retain community and leisure-related qualities while also supporting learning.

Libraries looking to demonstrate the impact they have on their community, especially in literacy development, should demonstrate and advocate for their role in community-based literacy development (Elkin, 2014; Goulding et al., 2014; Rankin, 2016). Articulating this impact can be achieved through better strategic planning.

Discussion of demonstrating value through strategic planning and alignment is mostly in the context of academic libraries. Saunders (2016) and Lakos and Phipps (2004) state that funding pressures and the greater need for accountability from stakeholders, especially their parent institution, are pushing academic libraries to demonstrate and articulate their value. Strategic plans provide libraries with the opportunity to make their contributions to the goals of the parent institution explicit, to articulate their value, and to hold themselves accountable to stakeholders through measurement and assessment (Lakos & Phipps, 2004; McKay, 2017; Saunders, 2016). Like academic libraries, public libraries face funding pressures and need to prove their value to their parent institution – local government – and to stakeholders such as the community, whose council rates provide funding to the library (McKay, 2017, p. 29).

Where the strategic plan lacked specific outcomes or goals related to literacy, librarians struggled to identify a library vision for children's literacy and relate it to storytimes. Personal aims for storytimes were often identical to the perceived aims of the library, suggesting librarians believe they're in alignment with their library's wider goals. Whether these library strategic plans were in alignment with goals and outcomes of their councils was not the subject of analysis in this research. McKay (2017, p. 27) examined the strategic plans of New Zealand public libraries and found that the weakest plans failed to align library outcomes and goals with those of their parent institution, and lacked an action plan for achieving their goals.

Lakos and Phipps (2004, p. 350) warn that "a profession that inherently believes that it is a 'public good' does not feel the need to demonstrate outcomes and articulate impact". Librarians in this study didn't identify the wider economic or cultural benefits of supporting lifelong learning or engagement in the library space. Only some identified storytimes as an

opportunity for developing literacy in the community. The library as a 'third space' can offer economic, educational, and cultural benefits to the community but these were not described. If librarians want to retain their storytimes in the face of financial constraints and understaffing, they must articulate why their storytimes matter.

6.2 STORYTIME TRAINING

Training was infrequent and focused primarily on creating engaging and enjoyable storytimes. This is in line with the overarching aim of print motivation.

Peer-coaching was described as a training tool for storytime programming by librarians. Peer-coaching is a mutually beneficial relationship between two peers of equal status that has the purpose of achieving stated goals, related to personal and professional development, through learning and support (Hagen, Bialek, & Peterson, 2017, p. 553; Parker, Kram, & Hall, 2012, p. 362). Librarians in this study described partnering with other librarians providing storytimes to build confidence in delivering storytimes and to learn relevant skills. Although the librarians did not mention working towards set goals, establishing goals – whether personal or professional – provides purpose to the relationship (Hagen et al., 2017, p. 551; Parker, Kram, & Hall, 2014, fig. 1). Peer-coaching is low-cost and is suitable to funding-constrained libraries. Parker et. al (2014, p. 2014) provide a three step model for peer-coaching which works to overcome the risks identified in their earlier work (Parker et al., 2012).

Peer-coaching has been used for improving storytime delivery. Stoltz et al. (2010) developed the Emergent Literacy Peer Coaching project to help Maryland librarians incorporate new techniques and theories from early literacy training initiatives into their practice. They state that only 5% of learners transfer new skills into practice as a result of theory, compared to 90% with theory, demonstration, and coaching (Stoltz et al., 2010, p. 45). Librarians, like those in this study, already engage in self-reflection and share resources and ideas with their colleagues. Stoltz et al. (2010, p. 49) formalised the relationships between librarians by creating an organisational culture which supported this form of learning, and providing staff with tips for coaching and supporting early literacy best practices in storytimes Unfortunately, the Emergent Literacy Peer Coaching wiki produced to support this project is no longer active.

Early literacy instruction and training related to school readiness was not mentioned as a desired area of future training by the librarians in this study. Although nearly all of the librarians held undergraduate qualification in Library and Information Studies, few explicitly related child development theory and early literacy to their storytime practice and were neutral on their qualification's impact on their practice. Training in early literacy skills is essential for providing librarians with the foundational knowledge to create storytimes which support and develop early literacy skills.

Early literacy instruction is theory based and the librarians expressed a preference for training which modelled ways to improve their practice. Training for early literacy-based storytimes should include practical tips for incorporating early literacy skills into storytimes and support a range a wide range of storytime styles. Training initiatives such as those discussed by Martinez (2007), Peterson (2012), Ghoting and Klatt (2014), and Ghoting and Martin-Díaz (2006) transfer theory into practice by providing coaching and modelling.

Goulding et al. (2017, p. 210) suggests changes to staff training may be required for librarians to better advocate for recognition from stakeholders and local/national policymakers as "providers of community-based literacy support". Training initiatives like those mentioned above provide librarians with the research to argue for their impact on literacy development in the community.

Retaining their individual style was highly important to librarians; storytimes are often "highly ritualized activities for both presenters and attendees" (Stewart, Bailey-White, Shaw, Compton, & Ghoting, 2014, p. 13). In trying to embed early literacy messages into storytimes, Stewart et al. (2014, p. 13) found more modelling, practice, and coaching was necessary in order for the librarians to achieve the fluidity and coherence of their existing practice. Incorporation of a variety of styles and techniques for presenting would enable librarians to better visualise themselves implementing early literacy skills in their storytimes (Stewart et al., 2014, p. 13).

As established in the literature review, there are existing programmes and resources for supporting the incorporation of early literacy skills into storytimes. Journals such as the American Library Association's *Children and Libraries* provides practical tips for improving storytimes, including the incorporation of early literacy messages and skills. Books such as

STEP into Storytime which provide storytime plans for mixed-age storytimes would be highly valuable to New Zealand librarians, especially for those working in libraries that do not have separate sessions for infants and preschoolers. Some librarians expressed difficulty planning programmes due to being unable to predict the age of attendees; Librarians brought a selection of books of varying lengths and complexity to meet the needs of a mixed-age audience. Carroll (2015, p. 27) similarly found the age of storytime attendees a factor in selecting the length and complexity of books.

Librarians admired and enjoyed learning from professional storytellers. Storytellers turn the story into a performance and utilise the body, voice, and props to engage the audience. Two librarians actively sought to incorporate the performance qualities of storytellers into their practice. Librarians referred to professional organisations such as the New Zealand Guild of Storytellers and the International School of Storytellers, as well as attending storytimes or workshops held by Katrin McMullan, Joe Harawira (Department of Conservation), Craig Smith, Moira Wairama, Baz MacDonald (Vic Books), and Charlotte McKay (The University Bookshop, Dunedin). Storytelling may not suit every librarians' style of presenting storytimes but storytellers can provide librarians with tips for engaging the audience, something that was reported as important to librarians.

7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to examine the extent to which early literacy research/theory informs the storytime practices of the participants. Firstly, the results found that developing a 'love of reading' or print motivation through enjoyment and engagement was the primary aim of storytime programmes. Some librarians reported secondary aims of supporting children's development of early literacy skills such as vocabulary, but these educational aims were not grounded in early literacy theory. Secondly, training in early literacy or child development outside of the Open Polytechnic qualification was rarely reported as undertaken or desired. Librarians preferred practice-based training which supported the development of engaging storytimes. This study did not find ECRR in use in the libraries surveyed. Thirdly, few library strategic plans included specific goals for storytime aims or tied library goals to Council goals and wider community benefits.

Storytimes have historically been a core service in public libraries, but libraries are increasingly facing funding and staffing challenges. If this service, as well as others, are to be retained, libraries must become better at advocating their value. Strategic planning is one tool available to libraries to communicate their impact to stakeholders. A shift in storytime practices and training may be necessary, especially if libraries wish to be recognised as supporting literacy and learning in their community. The development of an early literacy programme in New Zealand could be achieved locally and in line with *Te Whāriki* and librarians' values of fun storytimes in a community-centred library space. As highlighted in the Discussion, the practices of librarians are in alignment with *Te Whāriki's* sociocultural approach (Goulding et al., 2017). Although not a prescriptive curriculum, it is inclusive of parents' perspectives of early literacy (Zhang, 2017).

The results of this study provide library services delivering storytimes and the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) with potential methods for training librarians in storytime techniques such as peer-coaching, as well as highlighting the need for training which demonstrates how theory can be embedded in practice. Working with storytellers could ensure that storytimes remain engaging and enjoyable. Many of the librarians in this study mentioned providing storytimes to visiting preschool and primary school classes. Further research into the relationship between storytimes and education providers could be beneficial for establishing the role of storytimes in an educational context.

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9 APPENDIX – INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Kia ora [Title and Name]

My name is Alicia Harbison-Price and I am a Master of Information Studies student at Victoria University of Wellington. I'm inviting libraries to take part in my research into early literacy in storytimes.

The purpose of this research project is to investigate how New Zealand librarians running storytimes/toddertimes perceive their role in early literacy and their programming goals. I'm examining how those goals relate to their library, and what training or support these librarians are receiving.

I've looked at [library name] website and from the description of your storytimes, it looks like your staff are doing exciting things around early literacy! I would love to interview some of the librarians running these programmes. I'm looking to interview three staff at the most from [library district name], preferably working at different branches. During this research project, I'm hoping to talk to librarians working in a range of communities – big and small – to get the best idea of what New Zealand children's librarians are doing. The interviews should only take around 30 minutes and can be done over the phone or via email.

If you're interested and think your staff would like to take part, I can send more information including some areas of discussion, as well as the information and consent forms as required by the Human Ethics Committee.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards,

Alicia Harbison-Price

10 APPENDIX – INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project Title: Early Literacy in Children’s Storytimes

Researcher: Alicia Harbison-Price, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington

As part of the completion of my Master of Information Studies, this study is designed to investigate the extent to which early literacy research/theory informs the practice of New Zealand librarians delivering preschool storytimes. It will examine how librarians perceive their role in the development of early literacy skills and their aims for storytime programming. It will look at how their goals align with those of the library, and what training librarians receive or personally undertake to support their practice and the achievement of the programme’s goals.

This study will be beneficial for determining what training and support is currently available for New Zealand librarians involved in storytime programming, what training is desired, and if the practice of librarians is in alignment with the stated policies of their libraries.

Participation

Victoria University of Wellington requires, and has granted, this project approval from the School’s Human Ethics Committee. If you have any ethics queries you can contact AP Susan Corbett, the Human Ethics Committee Convener, at susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz or 04 463 5480.

I am inviting librarians who deliver storytimes to children (3 to 5-year-olds) to participate in this research. You will be asked to take part in a half hour telephone interview. You will be asked for permission to record the interview, and a transcript of the interview will be sent to you for checking.

Participation is voluntary, and neither you or your organisation will be identified personally in any written report produced as a result of this research, including possible publication in academic conferences and journals. All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor Anne Goulding, Professor

of Library and Information Management. The research project will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library. Additionally, a copy will be deposited with the Trustees of the National Library to be stored in the School Library Service.

Should you wish to withdraw from the project, you may do so within the two weeks following the completion of the interview and the data collected up to that point will be destroyed. All data collected from participants will be destroyed within two years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at harbisalic@mywuv.ac.nz or telephone 0212113597 or you may contact my supervisor Anne Goulding, Professor of Library and Information Management anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz or telephone 04 463-5887.

Kind regards,

Alicia Harbison-Price

11 APPENDIX – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND

1. What is your role?
2. How long have you been working for this library?
3. How long have you been running storytimes?
4. How would you describe your community?
5. Can you describe a typical storytime session for you?
 - a. How do you engage with parents/caregivers during storytimes?

STORYTIME AIMS - PURPOSE QUESTIONS

6. What is your goal/desired outcome for storytimes?
 - a. How do you achieve this/how do you know you've achieved this in your storytimes?
7. What do you feel your role is in the development of early literacy?
8. What is the library's vision for children's literacy?

STORYTIME TRAINING - PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

9. Do you have any qualifications which help you with storytimes?
10. In your opinion, what skills or knowledge does a librarian running storytimes need?
11. Have you received any training or support directly related to delivering storytimes?
12. How do you improve or evaluate your practice?
13. How do you feel about the support/training you receive from your library?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add about your or your library's approach to storytimes?

Alicia Harbison-Price
Student ID: 300232860

Word count: ~11594 excluding appendices, abstract, and acknowledgments.