

Storytime Observation

I observed Toddler Storytime at the Solano County Library, Fairfield Civic Center Branch. The current 40,000 square foot building was constructed in 1976 and recently renovated in 2002. The library features a computer center, study rooms (both adult and youth), the Friends of the Library Bookstore, a wireless network, self-checkout stations, and 60 public computer stations. The building is shared with the library administrative offices, library technical services, and the automation department. The Fairfield Civic Center Library (FCCL) is open 7-days a week with limited hours on Sunday from 1-5pm (FCCL, n.d.).

Children's librarian Yvette Klemm (Ms. Evie to the children) facilitated Toddler Storytime and was the sole presenter. This program is offered once a week and is publicized on the library's website, on both adult and youth bulletin boards, and the librarian herself informs parents of the program. There is no registration requirement for Toddler Storytime. The program I attended was held on Friday morning, October 8, 2010 from 11-11:45am. Toddlers and parents were all gathered in a room at the far corner of the children's library where disturbances could be kept to a minimum. Ms. Evie sat at the front of the room with a cloth wall to her back. The children and parents faced Ms. Evie; children sat on the floor with the entrance to the room to their backs, and adults sat in chairs that surrounded the children on the floor. The room was comfortable and fit all 25-30 toddlers and their parents, and I was pleased to see a large window that allowed the sun to warm the children just enough. Another benefit of the enclosed room is that it allowed the group to be loud without disturbing other library patrons.

While I could look up Fairfield's census statistics to get a better idea of the demographics

of the attendees, I would rather report on what I actually observed. The group was a mix of races including White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and some people who looked like they were of mixed races. It appeared that the children's ages ranged from 2 to 5 years old, and parents' ages seemed to be between 25 and 40 years.

To create a welcoming and calming environment, Ms. Evie had a song playing while people entered the room and took time to find their seats. The song was playing loudly, and I noticed Ms. Evie had to shout a little to speak to children and parents. The children seemed to appreciate the music and some were dancing in the middle of the room.

Song: "So Happy You're Here"

*Sing doo wah doo,
Tra La la
Yodele-ay,
Shan a na*

*Hi dee hi,
Howdy doo
It's all a funny way to say
We're glad you're here today!*

*Now give yourself a pat on the back
Reach out and shake your own hand
Give a gentle squeeze to say you're pleased
We're so happy you're here today, today
We're so happy you're here today.*

*Sing Fee fi fo
Fiddly dee,
Shooby doo.
Golly gee*

*Skizzamaroo,
And a hi to you
Now turn and face someone and say
We're glad you're here today!*

*Now give someone a pat on the back
Reach out and shake a hand*

*Give a gentle squeeze to say you're pleased
We're so happy you're here today, today
We're so happy you're here today.*

When the storytime began, Ms. Evie had to get everyone's attention so she clapped her hands and started softly singing "Our friends are here today." Once she had the full attention of the group, she explained that we would start with introductions and the distribution of name star necklaces for the children. Each child had a big yellow star necklace with their name printed in the center of the star. If children were regular attendees, their star was already made and used at every storytime. If children were new to the program, parents had the opportunity to make a star for their child so no one would be left out. Ms. Evie explained that she would call each child's name while the group sang the song, and each child would have to go to the front of the room to receive their star. The song is repeated until each child receives their star.

Song: "Our Friends are Here Today"

*So clap your hands and wave hello
because (child's name) is here today.*

After the introductions had finished, Ms. Evie explained that the topic for the day would be shapes. I was pleased to hear this because it meant the children were getting some kindergarten readiness instruction. Ms. Evie had several shapes pinned to the wall behind her and she told the group that she would be referring back to those shapes throughout the storytime to see if they were listening and learning. At this time, Ms. Evie introduced the first book which was *Mouse Shapes* by Ellen Stoll Walsh. *Mouse Shapes* is a large picture book with a brief sentence on each page. It seemed as though Ms. Evie would add-lib throughout the story to create excitement and to generate more reactions from the children. The story is about a group of mice who must find ways to hid from a mean cat who is chasing them. When the mice stumble

upon large shapes they begin to make disguises out of the shapes with hopes of fooling the cat. The disguises don't work so the mice must come up with another plan. Their next plan is to make large mice out of the shapes with hopes of fooling the cat once again. The plan works, and the cat runs away from the mice made of shapes never to return again.

After *Mouse Shapes* was read, Ms. Evie proceeded to direct the children's attention to the shapes pinned to the wall behind her. She asked the children to name each shape as she pointed to it. Most of the children were able to do this, and with a little help from parents the group began to call out the shapes more quickly and loudly. After the "name that shape" exercise, Ms. Evie played another song to get the group up and moving around to stretch. Ms. Evie gave each child a plastic egg with beads in it to shake during a pause in the song. Passing out the eggs took some time (about 4-5 minutes), but the activity was well worth the effort.

Song: "Can't Wait to Celebrate"
No written lyrics available.

After the song and once all the eggs had been collected, which took a little less time than passing them out, Ms. Evie read the second story. The title of the book is *My First Slide-out Book of Shapes* illustrated by Abodi Mo Shiri. The story is brief and required Ms. Evie to pull a tab to reveal a new shape on every page. The book gives examples of shapes by using fun objects the children will recognize: round cookie, oval balloon, square waffle. Ms. Evie involved the children by allowing them to shout out the name of the shapes. When Ms. Evie finished reading the story, she immediately announced that the group would now sing "Five little monkeys." The children were allowed to stand up and act out the moves the monkeys in the song were doing. This interactive song gives children practice with counting.

Song: “Five Little Monkeys”
There are many versions.

As Toddler time came to a close, Ms. Evie sat in front of the group with a small black kitten puppet. The children were asked to come to the front of the room to return their stars and receive a kiss from the library kitten. The children were so excited to receive a soft kiss from the kitten. Some children even went back for a second kiss even though they had already turned in their star. Once all the stars had been collected, Ms. Evie announced the last song they would sing as a group. The song was “If you’re happy and you know it.”

Song: “If You’re Happy and you Know it”
There are many versions.

Overall, the children were well behaved and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. Ms. Evie was active and involved the children as much as she could. There was one child who was a distraction for the duration of the program, and I thought Ms. Evie handled him very well. She didn’t really handle him; she just tried to ignore his bad behavior and left it up to his mother to handle (which she did). Ms. Evie focused on the program and didn’t let the young boy interfere with the stories or songs. After having some time to reflect on the morning program for toddlers, the only thing I would have done differently was to turn down the music a little while parents and children were settling in at the start of the program. It was quite loud, and parents were having a hard time hearing and speaking to their children. Otherwise, the program was a success and Ms. Evie seems to run a great storytime. Her efforts are validated by the returning children every week.

Conclusion

My observation of Toddler Storytime allowed me to evaluate the program based on specific criteria mentioned in the textbook. The criteria like registration requirements, age group

being served, the physical environment in which the program is being held, songs, concept books being used (like books on shapes), the use of props like puppets and noise makers, whether kindergarten readiness was addressed, whether the program was bilingual, and behavior issues the librarian has to deal with. Ms. Evie's program is successful because she incorporates many of the extra features of storytime even though they require more preparation and clean-up. Ms. Evie speaks Spanish as well as English, so she was able to communicate with more children, and parents who speak Spanish were able to communicate with her successfully and more comfortably. There are many little extras that add value to storytime programs, and when children have fun while they are learning parents are more likely to continue to participate in the programs proving to library administrators that programming is valued by the community. Another criterion for evaluation I would add to the list is enthusiasm level or level of commitment of the librarian. A committed and enthusiastic librarian makes a tremendous difference in how programs are received by the public.

References

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