

**L535: Library Services
for Children and Young Adults**
Spring, 2003
Sarah Wright, Instructor

**Real Program
Presentation Evaluations**

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Program 1: Daycare Preschool Storytime ("Wiggle, Shake: Snakes!")

Date performed: Thursday, March 13, 2003

Time: 3:30-4:00 p.m.

Location: Campus View Child Care Center (Bloomington, Indiana)

Host: Sarah Sparks (staff member; classmate)

Subjective Assessment: This was an extremely enjoyable program to perform. The children were warm, accepting and responsive, which made my job much easier. Of course, as preschoolers they were distractible and inclined to interrupt, but I have worked with and observed preschoolers before and probably would have been concerned if those factors *hadn't* been present. I was pleased that I was able to stay pretty much on track, especially during the reading of the "Hide and Snake" picture book, which left us most open to tangents, backtracking, and other threats to the momentum of the program (and of course there's always the kid who just wants to talk about something else, like comparative shoe analysis, which was fine with me so long as we got back to the snakes).

I felt that the whole thing went over pretty well, and my relative inexperience didn't end up tripping me up. The more I do this kind of thing, the less intimidating it is—the less it's about me being "good enough", and the more it's just about the material (like the stories) and the people I'm interacting with or performing for, no matter their ages. Even the craft at the end went pretty well (we made rattle-snake rattles out of folded envelopes with lentils for the shakers), which was where I was least certain of my skills as a demonstrator or as a "group kid activity" leader.

I was especially tickled by the reception of my "Baby Rattlesnake" story. I had been cautioned in my storytelling workshop (where I first worked up this tale) about the story getting too long and involved for short attention spans, and was concerned about repeating the "You're Too Little" song too many times. I was delighted to find not only that the song wasn't "too much", but that they *loved* it. When I started leaving it out as different characters came to the place where they would sing, the kids asked for the song again. And again. ☺ Different audiences might respond differently, but these kids really enjoyed having the song repeated and varied.

The most important thing to me on a subjective, personal level was that the kids enjoy themselves and at least appear to get something meaningful out of the program's different components. Secondarily, I wanted to feel comfortable doing it, and to be relaxed and confident as I interacted with the kids. I wanted to be able to keep the program focused while still allowing for those interactions and for the kids' personalities and moods to be what they were. On those counts, the program felt like a success.

Objective Assessment: My program plan was prepared as if I were a librarian with a specific library to promote. A major objective for my hypothetical

program was to build regular, ongoing relationships with child care centers, in order to reach kids who might not otherwise use the library. That particular objective could not be met in the same way in this context, since I couldn't act as a formal representative of, say, MCPL, and was there as a one-time guest (although I'll be very happy to go back and do similar programs in future). I did tell the kids where the "Hide and Snake" book came from, and boosted the library as the place to find more stories and have more story times.

The individual components of the program did have developmental objectives, which appeared to be met successfully. Fingerplays and action rhymes are meant to develop language skills as well as physical coordination and rhythm. These kids are familiar with those exercises already, since they are a regular feature of activities at the Center. This meant they were able to follow me when I introduced a new rhyme, and picked it up pretty readily. Crafts are also a familiar activity, and these kids are used to their routines in gathering at the craft table and following their own muses in making something. It was my job to fit into those routines without getting run over by them, and to be a good partner with the Center's staff members (Sarah and one other woman were present). I can imagine scenarios in which staff either "abandon" you when you come to give a program, or won't get "out of the way" to let you run the program; but Sarah and her colleague watched inobtrusively, and stepped in seamlessly when it was time to do the craft.

The "Hide and Snake" book was very effective at engaging the kids in visual discrimination (find the snake) and dialogic reading. It was more difficult to engage them in the book's rhyming text. This wasn't entirely bad, since they were telling their own stories about the snake (and about things the pictures reminded them of) as we progressed through the illustrations. It helped that we were a small group, and that I was sitting on a pillow on the floor with them: everybody could get close and get a good look. There was sometimes a little negotiation involved there, but again—it was important to me to keep attention reasonably focused without having an iron fist, and although we got a little scattered in places we never strayed too far and always came back to the book and the goals I had in sharing it with them.

In telling the story of "Baby Rattlesnake", my goals included reinforcing narrative sense, and stimulating discussion of or at least reflection on emotional content in the story (as well as entertaining). It's difficult to objectively assess those outcomes, but the kids did respond appropriately to my recap of the story line and brief questions about how Baby Rattlesnake felt.

The craft activity was a good training exercise for me. Developmentally, the folding required (at least for the size envelope I used with them) was a little beyond most of the kids in the group, as was the understanding of how many lentils they really needed for the relatively small (#10) envelope. Almost all of the children needed some coaching about "small handful" and asked for help in getting the lentils down to the "tail" of the envelope and getting it folded. Once past those hurdles, though, the kids enjoyed coloring their "snakes" and were excited to have their new rattles to take home.

Comments after completion: Projected attendance from my preparation with Sarah in setting up the appointment was up to ten kids; we had seven, aged three to five-almost-six. In planning my hypothetical program, I knew I would have to be prepared for a wide range in audience size, depending on the daycare center and the dynamics of the day. This particular program performance was scheduled during Spring Break, when there were a few less kids in attendance at the Center, which Sarah felt would make it easier on me. I can't comment on circulation, since I didn't track the children's library use after the program; that would, however, be an important evaluative element if I were performing the program as a "real" librarian. I met a gratifying positive reception both from the kids and from the staff, which encourages me to continue to visit there and to pursue this kind of program when my professional career commences.

Changes for the future: If I were to do this program again, or if I were to make a habit of daycare visits even while a student, I would want to be certain to gently but overtly promote the library. I made some small mentions this time around, but didn't really engage the kids about the value of the library for them. This wouldn't have to be lengthy—just being certain I had their attention, encouraging brief dialog about how/whether they use the library, and being enthusiastic about the good things waiting for them there. Another thing I did not do in this real-world, one-time "practice run" was to promote the program itself to parents ahead of time. In my program plan I prepared a flyer that would be made available parents in advance of each daycare visit. I was shy about doing that this time, since I wasn't sure I'd be back any time soon (and, again, I couldn't act as a "legit" representative of the library).

Program promotion and library promotion were my weakest elements for this real-world program, which are both essential to ensuring long-term effectiveness in the real library world (as opposed to just having a fun afternoon). I had a good time, and the kids had a good time, and the staff members were positive about the session; but to keep that going and extend its meaning—for the library, the daycare, and the families—I would need to work at building awareness and reinforcing connections.

This was an "easy" program to make happen. I was already aware of the Campus View Child Care Center as a good venue for student storytellers, since some of my classmates from the storytelling workshop had gone there for assignments in that course. Having Sarah in our class made it even simpler for me (and a good handful of my other classmates!) to plan one of the staples of library programming repertoire—a preschool story time—and perform it in a casual, welcoming setting. This was almost a "gimme" as an assignment for L535; and I am grateful I had the opportunity to practice in such a congenial environment.

Program 2: Teen Poetry Workshop

Date performed: Tuesday, April 22, 2003

Time: 3:15-5:15 p.m.

Location: Melton Public Library (French Lick, Indiana)

Host: Carol Thornton-Anderson (Library Director and Director of Youth Services)

This one will be a narrative. ☺

This program was an experiment for the Library, a first-time event in support of a poetry contest that has been held for the past six years. The kids in French Lick, while using the library heavily in a community that doesn't have many other healthy places for them to go, aren't used to having many library programs beyond the de rigueur preschool story times and booktalks Carol does in the schools—staff just isn't available. This workshop was really a first step. We knew as we planned the program that turnout would most likely be low, since the kids have to get used to the idea of library programs for them; they will need to see a few of them happen before they know what they are dealing with and whether they want to get involved. We also had the misfortune of our program date coinciding with an Academic Team meet, which we know kept some kids away from the event who had wanted to attend.

A somewhat unusual aspect of this program in relation to our assignment was that I didn't think it up entirely on my own, and wasn't doing the program by myself. Instead, I was invited to help make a program happen. The workshop might not have been held without my extra volunteer weight; but I was joining a library program, not designing and running it alone. This may be more realistic for actual library practice, but still made the situation different from my daycare preschool program.

The three of us doing the planning—Carol, myself, and our friend Amy—were all new to this. We all love poetry and believe in the special value it has as a tool for adolescents, and we were happy about the program plan we worked out together (with a big boost from my class assignment deadline), but we weren't entirely sure what to expect on the day of.

All that said: the program went well with the kids who came. Carol and I were well prepared with our intended program outline (see attached), and worked together well as co-moderators of the session (Amy had to stay home at the last minute with a nasty work project and a Day from Hell). Our worst-case scenarios were if only one or two kids showed up, or if nobody wanted to participate once they were there. Neither of those things happened. We only had four kids, three girls and one boy (and one of the girls was the boy's 6th-grade kid-sister), but we had a good mix of energy, laughter and creativity even so. I would have been thrilled if we'd had as many as ten kids, and was hoping for as many as six; but it all worked out with the four we had.

You never know what to expect when relating to teens, especially to teens who don't know you, but I was pleased by how well they responded to

me as the stranger from out of town. We all relaxed and talked about poetry (and read and wrote it), and joked around together. It was important to me to hear what they thought; I would have been very disappointed if they had just been wary around me or too self-conscious to discuss things like “what poetry is”—much less write impromptu poems together and even share them with each other.

Some of the conversation got a bit waylaid by one of the girls, who was there not only to talk about poetry but to talk about her (very painful) past, and her current status as a Christian. However, she is an avid reader and writer, and her eagerness to talk and to share her writing helped set the tone for the rest of us (there was never any ice to break).

My one real disappointment was with the pacing and timing of the program. It all ended too soon. ☺ In hindsight, our introductory section went on too long—although we did have good discussion about poetry, and the quotations went over well. We may have spent too much time reading poems we brought in; but they were all good poems, worth hearing.

We got started at 3:30; and the mother of the boy and his sister came to collect them just before 5:00. She was supportive and joined us for a bit while the kids valiantly read the four-part Paul Fleischman poem “Ghosts’ Grace” (yay! they went for it!)—but then they had to go, and one of the other girls had to leave soon after that as well, so we handed out door prizes and called it a day (I think I may have forgotten to mention those in my program plan: Carol bought a magnetic poetry stand with money from the YA coke machine, and I donated a blank book from home). We only got to do the first two, more “rote” writing exercises: an autobiographical, “fill-in-the-blank” poem, and a poem built from four words found on a page ripped out of a book. We didn’t get to play with the more creative exercises that would have drawn on memories, or images. The kids still produced some impressive work in those brief exercises, though, with some genuinely poetic results from the “four words from the page” exercise.

Objectively, it seems clear that for the kids who attended we met our goals of providing an environment for talking and thinking about poetry, and encouraging the kids both to keep writing and to submit an entry in the poetry contest. We all had a good time, and knowledge of that good time should (we hope) spread to other kids. I don’t know if Carol’s circulation will be impacted; she put together an excellent selection of poetry anthologies and novels in verse, and we did hand out the resource sheet, but nobody picked up a book from the table to check out (at least, not on Tuesday).

Working with Carol, and seeing first-hand how different the situation is in French Lick from what we’re familiar with in Bloomington, was extremely valuable to me. I hope to go back there, and maybe recruit some of my classmates, to help Carol provide the services for these young adults that she has all the insight, creativity and commitment to do, but not the essential resources of personnel. The community partnerships that make so many things possible in Bloomington just aren’t available in Orange County. You can’t collaborate with Parks & Rec when there *is* no Parks & Rec—no Boys & Girls

Club, no YMCA, no Volunteer Network, and no plethora of SLIS students looking for library experience. Carol has a welcoming, well-equipped library after the renovation they completed last year; now she just needs the people to make things happen.