

Running Head: FIELDWORK ASSIGNMENT

Fieldwork Assignment

Queens College

GSLIS 767

Introduction

Public librarians utilize many methods to motivate reading in their young patrons. To foster an excitement and love of reading there is a variety of reading techniques librarians use that range from reading aloud to sustained silent reading (SSR). Over the last three months, this author was lucky enough to observe five different reading motivation techniques for different ages in both the XXXX and XXXX Public Libraries. The five reading motivation techniques observed were reading aloud, picture book programs also known as story-times, storytelling, book talking and finally book discussions. The following paper will describe each of the library's population and resources, detailed accounts of all reading motivation programs, librarian interviews, and personal exchanges with young patrons. The paper will conclude with personal thoughts about these methods, behaviors and strategies.

XXXX Population and Resources

Located on Long Island's Gold Coast, the newly renovated, XXXX Public Library serves an upper class community of 17,148 people (Census, 2000). According to the 2000 census, 6.7% of the population is aged 5 and younger, while 74.8% is over the age of 18. 19.1% of this population is senior citizens. The ethnic breakdown of this community is 88.5% white, 8.7% Asian, 3.4% Hispanic and 1.2% African American (Census, 2000). As was stated before, this is an upper class community where the median family income is \$148,770 as compared to the national average of \$50,046 (Census, 2000)

In 2007, the children's department had an annual circulation of 64,513 which included renewals and materials of various formats. The annual attendance for all programs intended for children was 6,455.

Children's Services takes up a majority of the third floor in the library (See Appendix A) and includes three OPACs, three gaming computers for children ages three to six and eight computers with internet access for children ages seven to twelve. There are two separate areas for children, one is a play room, which can be accessed at any time while the other is the storytime room, in which programming takes place. The staff is fairly large, consisting of three full time librarians including the head of children's services, one part time librarian, one librarian trainee, one senior library clerk, one part time person in technical services and seven pages that work a combined 20 hours a week.

The programming budget totals \$18,000 which includes performances, publicity, materials and refreshments, with a majority of the budget allocated to performances. Circulation stats are hard to obtain as the circulation department is located on the first floor with statistics going to through the Nassau Library System and being reviewed only once a month. The children's librarian does not see this report yet knows that circulation for the entire library is down due to the enhancement of the local school libraries and competition from Barnes and Nobles which is located across the street. As for programming having an impact on circulation, statistics to support that are hard to come by, yet the head of the department provided an anecdotal response by indicating that programming brings people into the library and while there, they will take out materials. She even went on to say that a library which does not have programming will ultimately have lower circulation statistics (Roos, P. personal communication, May 5, 2008).

Reading Motivation Programs/Librarian Interview

The XXXX library children's department utilizes several reading motivation techniques for children 18 months to 10 years old. Each of the four full time librarians conducts different

programs based on their experience and age preference. Some librarians enjoy working with older children, while others prefer to work with toddlers. This delegation of responsibility ensures that each librarian is enthusiastic when conducting their programs thus making it enjoyable for the children. (As opposed to a separate “librarian interview” each librarian was “interviewed” after their respective program. Their views will be reflected within the discussion of the reading motivation technique.)

The first reading motivation observed was a book discussion. The XXXX library has book discussions for third and fourth graders. These programs are conducted every other week with a total of two books per grade. (See appendix B) Although there was an enrollment of 10 students per discussion, only one to three kids showed up on book discussion day. However, the low turnout allowed the librarian to facilitate individual literacy and comprehension skills by asking and answering questions, defining difficult vocabulary or phrases, allowing each child to read specific sections of the book, role playing certain parts of the book and finally relating situations in the book to real life experiences.

At this age, the librarian does not discuss themes, but elaborates on setting, plot and characterization, which are core elements of the story. To motivate additional reading, the librarian book talked similar books to the ones that were being discussed. For example, *The Search for Delicious* was compared to *The Polar Express* as having a similar motif; believing in things when logic says it is not possible. The book *Flat Stanley* was compared to *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *Imogene’s Antlers*, and *McBroom Tells a Lie* because they all contain elements of fantasy.

Another interesting tactic the librarian used was finding different versions of the same story and reading specific parts out loud. For example, *Flat Stanley*, written 40 years ago used a

cigarette case when being mailed to California. In the updated version, the cigarette case was changed to a toothbrush case, indicating what is politically acceptable to society. Before discussing *The Knee High Man*, the librarian read aloud different versions of the folktales exposing the children not only to alternate versions of a story but to other cultures.

The last book discussion was full of enthusiastic dialogue, creative thought processes and overall excitement that included great interaction among the kids. Afterwards; the librarian said “this excitement over a good book is why I do what I do and why I love a good book discussion” (Roos, P. personal communication, February 27, 2008). A possible suggestion for an increase in commitment would be the use of more contemporary novels and reminder calls the day before.

Storytime programs for four and five year olds were conducted by a librarian who held the belief that a program must address all aspects of a child’s developmental abilities (educate) and entertain without the child’s knowledge. Therefore, her programs incorporate activities that teach the “whole” child and encourage reading and literacy skills, physical coordination as well as basic math skills (Kanjarian, D. personal communication, March 3, 2008).

Each storytime begins with a physical activity that teaches coordination such as Hopscotch, Simon Says and the Hokey Pokey. The song, *Three Green and Speckled Frogs* is repeatedly sung each week and includes finger movements. As the song goes from three green frogs down to none, the coordinating fingers are subtracted thus teaching basic math skills and hand coordination. Both fiction and nonfiction picture books revolving around a particular theme were used.

For the storytelling portion of the program the librarian used the fairytale *Jack and the Beanstalk*. An interesting observation was how the children seemed much calmer and focused during the telling of these tales in contrast to the reading of a picture book. It was the librarian’s

philosophy that “words are more important than the pictures because it allows the children to picture the story in their minds which lays the foundation for reading a “real” book later on” (Kanjarian, D. personal communication, March 17, 2008).

This particular librarian not only addressed the needs of the children in her programming, she included parents by encouraging them to read to their kids at home. Each week, the librarian would set up a display of books for the parents to take home and read. One week it was chapter books, the next it was recipe books and another week was the Eye Spy collection. It was apparent that while some parents were eager to take these books home there were others who questioned them. One parent said that chapter books were too advanced for her child and did not have the time to read them a long story every night. Another mother claimed the recipe books had nothing to do with reading, until the librarian patiently explained how reading recipes encourage reading comprehension and following directions in a fun, non-threatening way.

Storytime Plus for first and second graders varied as the librarians for this program changed every week. One week, the program revolved around music, the next poetry, the next St. Patrick's Day. Because the children were older and had longer attention spans, the librarians were able to read more books at one time. This program solely focused on reading picture books and working on a related craft. There were quite a few children who owned some of the books that were read during storytime. It was amazing to see how excited they were to be read a story that was already familiar to them. While most of the stories were enjoyable and entertaining, reading motivation for this age was difficult. For example, one week the children were encouraged to find a poem they liked and read it aloud during the next storytime. Out of 12 students only one child brought in a poem while another read the poem “Sick” from the book

Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shell Silverstein. At this age, it was apparent that the children understood the difference between being entertained and educated and were much more excited when it came to making the craft.

Musical Moppets and Storytime for 18 months to 3 ½ year olds are lap programs meant to teach reading motivation techniques to caregivers by having them interact with their children using nursery rhymes, board books, puppets and songs. As the librarian pointed out, “reading aloud or engaging children in conversation comes naturally to some parents but not to all.”

(Benigno, B. personal communication, March 11, 2008) Repetition of the hello song in the beginning and the goodbye song at the end along with saying each child’s name was key for both programs, as it caught the toddler’s attention and acclimated them to the start and end of each program. Board books were used to show caregivers how to engage toddlers by pointing to the pictures while saying the names of the objects. The librarian also pointed out that it is okay for children to put books into their mouths or turn pages randomly, because toddlers learn by using all of their senses; touch, taste, smell, sight and sound (Benigno, B. personal communication, March 25, 2008).

In this program, the librarian offered each child to take the books home (without checking them out) until the next storytime. It was amazing how many caregivers turned down the offer. Another astonishment was how many caregivers didn’t know, age old, nursery rhymes and how many parents used these programs to converse with their friends as opposed to participate. In one session, a father of an 18 month old allowed his child to crawl around the floor without going after him. This child crawled right out of the circle, onto the hard floors to under a table while the father just sat there. This author had to retrieve the baby several times. After the session, the librarian told the father that his child may not be ready for this program,

and that the baby could be switched to another program more suited to his developmental abilities.

Personal exchange with children

In the fourth grade book discussion, there was a young girl who emigrated here from Germany. After speaking to her for a while, it became evident that at home, her family only spoke German. This situation did not allow her much of an opportunity to speak English. For her, these books discussions provided an opportunity to expand her English vocabulary, practice her pronunciation and increase her reading comprehension all without the added pressures of testing and writing.

It was in Storytime Plus, where this author met Daniel, an InfoKid whose only interest is Nintendo DS or other video games. His sole request was that the books and the craft be about videogames. Each week, Daniel became increasingly distracted and distracting to the other kids in the program. While extremely intelligent, it was difficult to have a conversation with Daniel unless you understood what he was talking about. His conversations completely and totally revolved around video games. At the start of the Spring session of Storytime Plus, Daniel surrounded himself with other kids that liked videogames almost as much as he did, but as the program progressed his relationship with these other boys diminished. The other boys became friendly with others in the group and were able to have discussions that included other interests, such as the collection of Kooky pens. As much as this author tried to establish a relationship with Daniel, it was increasingly difficult as he disliked the books that were being read and stopped making the crafts. It is this author's assumption that Daniels mom signed him up for this program to expose him to other interests to no avail.

XXXX Population and Resources

Located on the south shore of Long Island, lying near the border of Queens, XXXX Public Library serves a middle class community of 23,231 people (Census, 2000). According to the 2000 census, 5.9 % of the population is aged 5 and younger, while 77.7% is over the age of 18. 18.2% of this population is senior citizens. The ethnic breakdown of this community is 92.3% white, 2.9% Asian, 7.9% Hispanic and .9% African American (Census, 2000). While not as wealthy as the XXXX library, this is still an upper middle class community where the median family income is \$76,116 and is still higher than the national average of \$50,046 (Census, 2000).

At the end of 2007, the children's department had an annual circulation of 53, 703 which included renewals and materials of various formats. The annual attendance for all programs intended for children was 3,980.

Unlike XXXX, the physical size of the library, fiscal budget and actual staff are much smaller in XXXX. The children's department includes the YA collection and is located on the same floor as adult reference. There are three full time adult reference librarians, two full time children's librarians and one part time librarian. Because of location, the two full time children's librarians perform adult reference when needed as well as their own reference and readers advisory. They are also responsible for ordering all materials for children and Young Adult. Additionally, they organize and conduct all youth programming, collaborate with the schools and weed their collection.

There are two OPACS, two gaming computers for three to seven year olds and four computers with internet access for eight to seventeen year olds. Storytime is held in a room upstairs, in what was the original library, now used as a community meeting space and for storytimes.

Reading Motivation Programs

Although the time spent in XXXX was considerably less than XXXX, it was important to see the alternate reading motivation styles of librarians. Although the names of the programs are different, for the most part, they are similar to the programs previously observed and therefore will not require as much detailed description.

The first program, called Alphabet Soup is for children ages three and up with their caregivers. This program revolves around the “letter of the day,” in this instance “U.” A worksheet containing different types of umbrellas was completed and a story about rain was read. The program ended with a craft related to “April Showers”. This program makes the connection between letters and words and words to everyday life.

Baby Rhyme Time is for infants of 10 weeks old to pre-walkers along with their caregivers. This program is similar to XXXX’s Musical Moppets in that it is geared towards educating parents in how to interact with their children utilizing nursery rhymes, music movement, puppets and books. Nursery rhymes were written on big cue cards for parents to see and repeat. This concept was ideal in that it freed the caregiver’s hands so they could explore hand and leg movement with their children. In this particular group, the joy and bond that was created by singing songs like “Wheels on the Bus” and reciting nursery rhymes was palpable. The babies were smiling and the adults were participative. Respectfully, the ten adults waited until the end of the program to converse with each other. After the program, the librarian told me how important baby programs are to children as they encourage new vocabulary with the comfort of repetition (Eagan, L. personal communication, April 16, 2008).

Toddler Storytime for 2 1/2 - 3 1/2 year olds with caregivers incorporated books, finger plays, and stories and more. Once again, the program revolved around the theme of loud noises.

Noisy Nora was one of the books read and a flannel board using pictures of loud items was used. The program ended with musical instruments being handed out.

Pre-school Storytime for 3 1/2 - 6 years old included reading stories, singing songs and reciting finger plays without caregivers. The program observed revolved around books relating to food along with two flannel board stories. It was interesting to watch how engrossed the children were watching the story unfold on the flannel board. This technique was a new one to watch yet was highly effective in capturing and maintaining the children's focus.

Lil Playmates for walkers - 19 month and 29 month olds are programs revolving around socializing, playtime and something called "circle time" which is a mini version of storytime. A few books are read and nursery rhymes and finger plays are performed.

After hearing about using dogs as a reading motivation tool, the Happy Hound Read Aloud was a pleasure to watch. Children were given fifteen minutes to read their favorite book to trained guide dogs. The excitement on the kid's faces was extraordinary to watch as was the calm and loving reaction of the dogs.

Librarian Interview

While cutting out pictures for one of the flannel board presentations, the librarian in XXXX had some keen observations regarding reading motivation techniques and the impact the library has on the children that attend these programs. In her experience, the wealthier libraries have less of an impact on children than the libraries in poorer communities. Wealthy parents don't need the library because they can afford to buy books for their kids, creating personal libraries for their children. Additionally, parents have the financial means to send their children to alternate programming such as Gymboree, Tutor Time and Pre-K. It is the kids and parents that don't have access to alternate and expensive programming that truly benefit from public

library reading motivation programs as this may be the only chance parents have to learn and apply such techniques (Eagan, L. personal communication, April 15, 2008).

When asked about circulation statistics and if it is affected by programming, the librarian concurred with XXXX's librarian; although statistics are difficult to tract, parents and caregivers are more likely to take materials out because they are already in the library for a program than if they weren't (Eagan, L. personal communication, April 18, 2008). Additionally if there was a program related to a certain topic, such as reptiles, there would be an increase in the circulation of those topically related books (Eagan, L. personal communication, April 18, 2008).

Conclusion

As the observation of these programs came to an end, there were several important conclusions that resulted from this study. Reading motivation techniques are important not only to establish early literacy skills but to help foster a love and excitement about books and increase the pleasure of reading. However, reading motivation cannot be static; the once a week exposure to library programs is simply not enough to sustain a lifetime love of reading. These techniques must be reinforced, emulated and encouraged by the caretakers and parents of children. A second part to this conclusion is that reading motivation programs are not one dimensional. Librarians are not only interested in putting books into children's hands; they are intent on utilizing multi-faceted methods which engage all the senses affecting the "whole" child.

A second conclusion resulting from numerous discussions with librarians is that reading motivation programs should be fun and not imposed on a child for fear of negative connotations towards the library, librarians, programming and most importantly books.

And finally, while both observations were conducted in predominantly white, wealthy neighborhoods, in retrospect it may have been beneficial to observe programs in different socio-

economic environments, which not only would have answered many questions, it could have raised a few more.

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Appendix A

Appendix B