Intentionality, Interactivity, and Community: Building Blocks for Effective Early Learning Programming at Public Libraries

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Interactivity is key: when children are engaged and invested, they’re learning.
Intentionality

- Intentionality enables storytimes to be rich in learning and also leaves space for individual creativity.
Community

- A community is grounded in common experiences and background and in the need to constantly develop and grow in your practice.
Early Learning & Early Literacy

• **Early learning** - the awareness and development of skills during the early years that promote success in school and lifelong learning

• **Early literacy** - what a child knows about reading before they are actually able to read
The History
The Research
To understand the early literacy impact of storytime.

Quasi-experimental study with an intervention

Observations of 240 storytimes in 40 libraries across the state of Washington
Findings

Year One

- Librarians are incorporating a wide variety of early literacy content;
- Children are demonstrating a wide variety of early literacy behaviors;
- Children are responding to the early literacy content that the librarians are including in the storytime.

Year Two

- A purposeful focus on early literacy in the storytime content had a measurable effect on the observable early literacy behaviors of the children who attend storytime.
Assessment of Storytimes
The Framework

COMMUNITY

Intentionality

Interactivity
#IRL: Intentionality
#IRL: Interactivity
#IRL: Community

STORYTIME UNDERGROUND

LITERACY IS NOT A LUXURY
3 phases of research

Public libraries are indeed offering a wide variety of types of outreach programs in the community.

Programs were offered for a variety of groups, such as:

- People with low SES,
- People lacking transportation,
- Children in districts with low rates of grade-level reading,
- Children with different abilities,
- Diverse ethnic and immigrant families, and
- Families experiencing homelessness.
Challenges, Barriers, & Partnerships

Challenges
- Lack of staff
- Communication
- Fiscal limitations
- Language barriers

Barriers
- Transportation
- Fear of fines
- Language and Culture
- Lack of awareness of library services
**Outreach Continuum**

**Active** - programs that involves group participation by librarian, children, and caregivers within a designated time

**Passive** - program that is more marketing focused, less structured, and doesn’t necessarily require interaction between participants
A Robust Approach to Early Learning Programming

- **Intentionality** - be intentional about building an array of active programs both in and out of the library that help to support a variety of early learning skills in a fun, play-based manner.

- **Interactivity** - get your program participants involved in the content of the programs and with each other.

- **Community** - place your community of young children and their families at the center of everything you do and build your programs and services around their needs and aspirations.
1. How these tenets might fit into your own practice and what you’re doing to promote early literacy and early learning in your own work?

2. How are you going out into your community to reach and engage children and families in underserved communities? How can you extend and deepen that engagement?

3. What do you see as the future of early learning in your library, your community and public libraries more broadly?
Looking Into the Future

- Position yourself as an early learning leader
- Build on your strengths in family engagement to support learning for the entire family around helping their young child grow and develop
- Always be reflecting on your programs and asking yourself if these programs are as effective as they could be and if they are impacting your whole community? Who are you not seeing in your programs and who could you be reaching out to?
“Everything changes when we read. The simplest way to make sure that we raise literate children is to teach them to read, and to show them that reading is a pleasurable activity. We need to get our children onto the reading ladder: anything that they enjoy reading will move them up, rung by rung, into literacy. A library is a place of safety, a haven from the world, it’s a place with librarians in it.”

--Neil Gaiman and Chris Riddell