

Storytime Observation Analysis

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INFO 281-19: Early Literacy Storytime

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Professor Amanda Choi

Storytime Observation Form

Your Name: Mark Bachofer

Library where you observed storytime: Lafayette Public Library

Date and time of observation: Monday, July 8, 2024, 9:30am

Welcoming Environment

How did the storytime presenter welcome families and help participants warm up to the environment? How did the presenter ensure storytime participants experienced a comfortable setting with a clear view of the storytime presenter?

This storytime was unique, as it was performed outside the library, and by a community partner, rather than a library staff member. This presenter, I later learned from my colleagues in the library, was Bel, of Bel and Bunna's Books, a local bookstore. She asked if she could come and put on a storytime, and the library was happy to be able to work with her. Her storytimes take place every Monday at 9:30am – and the consistent time and day made it so that the participants knew exactly when and where to be.

Regarding the where, this storytime occurred at the Lafayette library amphitheater. This outdoor area consists of a set of six or seven large concrete steps leading down to a small plaza. Fake grass for sitting makes up the majority of each step, and there is about a two-foot drop between each tier. As the participants mingled and chatted on the steps while waiting for storytime to begin, I felt that this environment clearly defined the storytime space, yet still provided an excellent view of the presenter throughout.

However, as an outside space, the amphitheater came with a few obstacles. The presenter had to project a lot to reach the back rows, and when heavy construction vehicles rolled by, the noise did force the storytime to pause until they had passed. Additionally, the online event page for this storytime notes that participants may wish to bring a blanket, as at 9:30 in the morning, the library itself shades the amphitheater – and that the event can be canceled due to weather.

Despite this, the morning was warm and sunny as Bel arrived and greeted the audience. There were roughly 80 people in attendance, so she projected loudly that she was happy to see everyone. She subsequently

launched into an introductory song, *If You're Happy and You Know It*. This seemed to be a common occurrence, as everyone was able to immediately sing along, and after 'shouting hooray!' the audience got settled for the first of three stories.

Bel introduced the fact that she had three stories to read that day, and added that the first one was 'a favorite' – which I felt was an ideal solution to presenting a book that had been read before. I heard several caregivers tell their kids "It's time for the Beep Beep story!" which led me to think that this story might be read every week, or maybe every other. Also, while the aforementioned construction vehicles did derail the story temporarily, given that the book was *The Little Blue Truck*, Bel was able to transition from waving at the trucks back to the story with ease.

After the story was concluded, Bel gave a quick informational aside to the adults present, letting them know of a few changes in the upcoming storytimes, but informing them that they occurred every Monday morning outside the Lafayette Library.

In conclusion, there was not much preamble to this storytime welcome. The presenter arrived, and launched promptly into their introductory song and initial story. However, given the size of the crowd, and the amphitheater setup, I think that this was a wise choice. They wouldn't be able to address each person individually, so they opted for a song that everyone could join easily, and a story that the majority was familiar with.

Storytime Content/Presentation

Storytime age group (advertised): Preschoolers (3-5 years), Toddlers (1-3 years)

Storytime age group (observed): The advertised age group was accurately represented by the audience I saw.

There were some older children, but the majority fell into the preschooler/toddler age range.

Number of participants: 77 participants (adults and children)

Storytime length: 30 minutes

List all Storytime elements included: The presenter included six songs, three books, and two parental asides/announcements in their storytime. See outline below:

- Song: If You're Happy and You Know It
- Book: The Little Blue Truck by Alice Schertle, illustrated by Jill McElmurry
- Informational Aside/Greeting: Discussion of when storytimes occur, changes regarding future programs
- Song: Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes
- Song: Happy Birthday
- Song: ABC Song
- Book: How Do Dinosaurs Stay Friends by Jane Yolen, illustrated by Mark Teague
- Song: The Wheels on the Bus
- Informational Aside: Repetition of earlier announcement for those who were not there at the beginning
- Book: Pop-Up Peekaboo Monkey by Dawn Sirett, illustrated by Eleanor Bates and Helen Senior
- Song: Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star
- Giveaway: Stickers

How did the presenter match appropriate books and activities with the storytime participants, taking into consideration the age of children in attendance, various languages spoken, and the attentiveness of children on that particular day?

Bel clearly knew her audience, and brought led both books and songs that were age-appropriate – and more importantly, audience-appropriate. With such a large audience, teaching new songs could be a challenge, so the presenter's selection of traditional songs felt on point. Furthermore, she ensured that even those in the back row (about fifty feet away) could keep up with the music by using expressive hand gestures and clapping to keep the rhythm. Additional engagement was encouraged by asking the audience to 'get ready with their wheels' for the Wheels on the Bus, and directing the Happy Birthday song to a specific audience member.

The books that Bel selected were similarly well-picked. She showed great familiarity with all of them, seeming to even have The Little Blue Truck memorized! This allowed her to hold the book up so that all could see it, even if they were sitting at a greater distance. She made sure to point at the words as she read, and brought in hand gestures for onomatopoeia. On How Do Dinosaurs Stay Friends, which has smaller text, she also described what was going on on many of the pages. Finally, Bel also paused to pose dialogic questions to the audience, such as asking 'if they could dance' for the Peekaboo story, as well as the other actions that the characters took. These interactions allowed Bel to keep a cohesive storytime rolling, and overcome any challenges regarding the large space.

Engagement of Children

What techniques did the presenter use to help children stay engaged in storytime? How did the storytime presenter ensure the pace or flow matched that day's audience? What transition activities worked well?

In my opinion, the audience was very engaged with this storytime, though Bel did not seem to adapt her performance to cater to them very much. Her clear, projected voice ensured that everyone could hear, and she asked dialogic questions (or at least yes/no ones) that kept each story moving along. Speaking of momentum, with such a large audience, Bel focused mainly on keeping the storytime rolling, and I think I agree with her decision.

When I conduct storytime, I have a small crowd, usually between six and fourteen participants. With such a group, I can pause to chat with them, and bring up interesting anecdotes. However, with an audience of over seventy, Bel needed to make sure that she kept everything flowing. There was not much in the way of transitions; songs and stories were announced, and jumped into headfirst. In another setting, I could critique this abruptness, but the audience didn't seem to mind, and responded well.

I think the greatest technique that Bel used in her storytime presentation was repetition. Even after only attending once, I picked up on the fact that many stories were repeated from previous weeks, as were several songs. Parents and children alike knew to make 'Beep Beep!' sounds for The Little Blue Truck, and she even made a point that she was changing some of the lyrics for The Wheels on the Bus from previous weeks. This consistency allowed her audience to know more or less what to expect from each storytime.

Finally, I have to mention that the sticker giveaway at the end absolutely engaged the children present at storytime. Bel was surrounded by children, though all seemed to be waiting patiently for their prize. If this is a common gift given at storytime, I could see it being a powerful incentive to be patient and wait for the end of the program.

Engagement of Parents/Caregivers

What techniques did the presenter use to engage parents/caregivers in storytime? List the types of engagement you observed throughout the storytime, along with any suggestions you can think of to encourage more active participation.

I did not see many specific techniques that Bel used to engage the parents and caregivers present. She delivered a pair of asides to discuss what the storytime was, and any upcoming changes to the presentation, but she seemed primarily to address the caregivers and parents through their kids. I did not hear any literary asides, or advice on reading at home with kids.

Additionally, from where I sat in the back, I heard a significant number of caregivers speaking in Spanish, both to each other, and to their children. The storytime that Bel delivered was entirely in English, so I wonder if incorporating Spanish in some capacity would lead to higher levels of adult engagement. However, when beginning *The Wheels on the Bus*, Bel mentioned that in past weeks, the lyrics had been “the mommies on the bus go shh, shh, shh,” and that from this week forward, we would be changing to “the grownups on the bus” instead, so there is evidence of her altering her presentation to be more welcoming for all adults. Still, storytime isn’t just for the kids – we want to be inspiring the parents to engage in similar practices at home.

Behavior Management

What challenges came up during the storytime? What management techniques were used effectively to help everyone enjoy the experience? How did the presenter use a strengths-based approach to communicate with participants?

The largest challenge that cropped up during this storytime was absolutely the ongoing construction work. On at least three different occasions, large equipment rolled down the street, completely drowning out any hope of hearing the presenter. However, Bel rallied expertly from this. Some of the audience waved at the trucks going by, and she encouraged waving goodbye to them – and it helped that *The Little Blue Truck* featured a dump truck as a pivotal character.

Another potential challenge arrived when a child walked up to her book bag and picked up her storytime rabbit. At this time, Bel was in the middle of reading a book, and I wondered if she was going to pause to

request it back. However, she instead utilized a strengths-based approach, and relied on the child's caregiver – who promptly sent the child back up to return the rabbit. Perhaps this is a regular occurrence, but this action reinforced one of the underlying rules of the storytime: sit and listen, don't come up and take the presenter's items. It also put the onus of acting well back onto the child and the caregiver, rather than diverting the attention of the entire audience to one person's minorly disruptive act.

The last instance of a storytime challenge occurred during the last story. By this point, the audience was a little more wiggly, and there were fewer people paying attention to the book. To combat this, Bel emphasized the interactive sections of the book, asking the children if they could dance, jump, and do the other actions that were described in the book. She also increased her own volume to read louder. I think that the former strategy was more effective than the latter, but regardless, Bel was able to get her storytime back on track and finish her tale.

Observer Reflection

What did you learn from this storytime demonstration? What are your takeaways from this experience? What best practices did you discover? Or was there anything you would have done differently?

I think that I learned a lot about how to manage a very large crowd from this storytime demonstration. There's a lot of energy that can be harnessed in such an environment, and that has to be dealt with very carefully. When I'm doing my own storytimes, I tend to encourage a higher level of energy, but I think that if I tried that in such a scenario as this, it could quickly grow out of control.

I did miss the existence of transitions in Bel's presentation. I feel that they better allow for a flow from one song or book to another, and without them, the storytime feels a little more disjointed. I understand that the large audience size makes it difficult to tailor comments or transitions to individuals, but I think that even a few sentences would help smooth the storytime out.

Finally, ever since learning more about early literacy skills, I've tried my best to incorporate them into my storytimes – I was already doing print literacy with alphabet puzzles, but I've added rhyme games and other such activities. I think that this presentation could have benefitted from some audience participation – maybe

asking for suggestions of what else could be seen during the bus song, or what the audience thinks might happen next in the books.

Overall, this was a very good storytime presentation. I was thoroughly impressed by Bel's ability to handle such a large crowd. I believe that her success lies largely in her consistent schedule and familiarity with her material. By keeping my own storytimes structured in a similar manner, I think that I can find the same levels of success. I still plan to keep a transitional patter going through my storytimes, as I feel that it allows the audience to connect the stories and ideas together – though I may have to add a sticker giveaway to my own presentations.