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**Story Time to Encourage Early Literacy**

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Abstract

In light of falling literacy rates among children, I hosted a story time at the local public library in hopes of encouraging reading and literacy in early childhood aged children. I believe these rates are falling because of the lack of exposure to books and digital distractions. The children and their parents were able to benefit from the story time by providing them with an entertaining event while revealing to them what the library has to offer. Although the event itself was small, the lasting impact it can have is great. Keywords to represent this project are encouraging, educational, and entertaining.
Section 1: Introduction to Capstone Project

During my time at Boise State University, I have focused my studies on early childhood education. A large part of a child’s success in their education is their ability to read and literacy skills. Early literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they actually know how to read and write (Ghoting & Martin-Diaz, 2006, p. 5). Shared-reading activities are often recommended as the single most important thing adults can do to promote the emergent literacy skills of young children (Lonigan et. al., 2007, p. 153). I believe that literacy rates in young children are becoming lower because of several different reasons. First, children lack exposure to books. Literacy experiences are more likely to occur in homes that contain children's books and other reading and writing materials (Snow, et. al., 1998, p. 121). I believe this lack of exposure to books is because of financial and/or time constraints with parents. I also believe that digital entertainment such as streaming videos and video games play a part in the issue. I feel as though some parents, unknowingly, simply do not know how to encourage reading in their children.

In order to take action against these concerns, I decided to host a story time at the public library. This event was not only entertaining (without digital means) and educational for the children, but also free of charge for parents eliminating any financial constraints. This event brought children and their parents into the library to expose them to the abundance of books they have access to at no charge. Additionally, hosting the story time at a place that is open to the general public, the facility nor the event posed any biases. I hope that through my story time children and their parents began to understand that books can be pleasurable and can learn to implement reading on a regular basis at home. By providing parents and caregivers with crucial early literacy information, modeling behavior, and offering ideas on ways to build these skills in children, we help parents build a strong foundation for reading success (Ghoting & Martin-Diaz,
To begin planning this story time, I partnered with the librarian to choose a date and time that was available at the library. To advertise the story time, I then created a flyer that I distributed to local businesses and the town newspaper ran a news article about the story time as well. I hosted the story time and measured my success by a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures.

Section 2: Elements Coming Together

When approaching this issue, I had to consider the perspectives of the parents and the children attending the story time. What did they expect to get out of it? While I had my sights set on encouraging reading, the children were looking for entertainment. I believe the parents were looking for a combination of something that was educational and entertaining for their children. Some researchers have found that parents who believe that reading is a source of entertainment have children with a more positive view about reading than do parents who emphasize the skills aspect of reading development (Snow, et. al., 1998, p. 138). Children who learn from their parents that literacy is a source of enjoyment may be more motivated to persist in their efforts to learn to read despite difficulties they may encounter during the early years (Snow, et. al., 1998, p. 143). A child friendly book with a matching stuffed character was used to boost the entertainment value for the children. I hope that my story time modeled a parent-child reading activity for parents to share with their children regularly at home. Setting aside time for reading and book-related conversations is probably the single most effective thing that parents can do to increase their children’s exposure to words and their overall language learning (Bardige, 2011, p. 55).

Low literacy rates in children are widely apparent to me because of my studies in early
childhood education. However, personally, I am aware of myself as a parent who sometimes falls short of supporting it in my own children as I should. I fall guilty of allowing my children to watch more TV or have more tablet time than they should. A few studies have focused on the possible relation between the significant presence of background television noise in the first few years of life and less reading and poorer cognitive development in general at an older age (Lemish, 2007, p. 407). I believe that the importance of reading and books could easily be overlooked by some parents who have not studied education in the depths that I have. During this project, I have had to manage my emotions and turn off biases towards those such parents. If I truly wanted to reach the children with the greatest need, I had to accept even those children who may have never opened a book on their own or the parents that had never read to their children at home.

When first considering early childhood literacy issues, I had to find what I believed to be the root of the problem. Those roots were primarily lack of exposure to books, possibly because of financial constraints, digital distractions and parents simply unintentionally not encouraging reading. I had to create a solution that could meet all of those factors. I needed something free, something that gave ample exposure to books, and somewhere that digital distractions were not prevalent. Also, it needed to be entertaining for the children. I found that hosting a story time at the public library was a creative solution that met all the factors. This approach is unique because of the issues it helps remedy. It creates a fun and free event for children. It gives parents a way to expose their children to books at no cost and it also models a shared-reading activity that parents can continue to carry on with their children at home.

For my innovation solution, first I had to partner with the librarian to choose a date and time that was available at the library. Next, I had to choose a book and theme for the story time. I
chose an Easter themed book called “Peter Rabbit” in hopes that it would catch the children’s attention since it was appropriate for this time of year. To advertise the story time, I then created a flyer that I distributed to the schools, daycares, and other local businesses, and the town newspaper ran an article about the story time as well. A Peter Rabbit stuffed animal was used to complement the book. The children seemed to enjoy the coordinating pieces during the story. I believe the stuffed animal helped the story come to life for the children. I created a questionnaire for qualitative measure and kept records for quantitative measure also. After hosting the story time, I feel confident that this innovative approach tackled the goals I was wanting to achieve. Children were exposed to books in a fun way at no charge and a successful story time was modeled for parents.

Section 3: Results

To measure the success and impact of this project, I took a qualitative and quantitative approach. For a quantitative measurement, I documented the number of children who attended the story time. Also, the librarian tracked the number of children visiting the library before and after the story time to see if the number of children increased. Only 5 children attended the story time. The overall number of children visiting the library did not drastically change after hosting the story time (Teague, 2024). For a qualitative measurement, I created a questionnaire that I asked the parents to complete after the story time was over. The following questions were asked on the questionnaire. Is this the first story time at this library that you have attended? 3 answered no, that it was not their first story time and 2 answered yes, that it was their first story time. Do you believe your child enjoyed the story time? All answered yes, they believed their child enjoyed the story time. Do you plan to/did you check out books for your child to take home today? All answered yes, they checked out books for their children to take home. Do you spend
time reading with your child daily? 4 answered yes, they spend time reading with their child daily and 1 answered no, they do not read daily with their child. Would you like to bring your child to future story times at the library? All answered yes, they would like to come to future story times. Do you visit or plan to visit the library regularly? All answered yes, they would like to visit the library regularly.

Being that only 5 children attended the story time, the number of children visiting the library tracked by the librarian did not drastically change. However, two of the children that attended the story time that checked out books, have returned their books and checked out more. Also, one of those two children was one who attended story time there for the first time (Teague, 2024). While none of these numbers are large quantitatively, focusing on the qualitative results are important.

Through this project, I believe that the children of our community benefited by providing them with an entertaining event and sources that encourage reading and therefore their literacy. The parents of the children are benefited by providing them with an entertaining event for their children at no charge. They were introduced or reminded of the free books that are available to their family. A story time was modeled that they can continue with their children at home in hopes of encouraging their children’s early literacy, aiming to avoid reading issues with their children later in life.

**Section 4: Conclusion**

When originally planning the date for the story time, I chose a day that school was out in hopes of attracting more children and their parents, however the school changed the schedule and it was not in my favor. Additionally, the town where I live is small therefore the local library is a small facility as well. For my next story time, I would choose a place and time in which I can
reach a larger number of children. Initially, after hosting the story time, I was disappointed in the fact that only 5 children attended. However, after having some time to reflect, I realized that the issue at hand, low literacy rates in children, is a rather large and widespread issue. So, I began to focus on the few children and parents that I did reach instead of the hundreds of thousands that I did not reach. This is a topic that is important to me professionally and personally so even making a small impact is fulfilling. This experience has given me a greater understanding of how to organize these types of events for success in the future.
Section 5: References


Section 6: Appendix

- Final Capstone Submission