
The Development of Children's Programming Guidelines: Our Experience

Barbara Freedman

The past few years have witnessed a tremendous growth in the size of the professional children's services staff of the Cumberland County Public Library and Information Center in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Consequently, there has been much growth in the services that are offered by the library system. From a staff of one professional and two paraprofessional children's programmers in 1985, the department has grown to its current level of five full-time professionals and one paraprofessional in 1989. There is also hope for further expansion as the county constructs new facilities and the library develops new services in the coming years.

The structure that links all children's programmers in this county is an informal one, as there is no children's coordinator for the system. Instead, there is an organized children's department within the headquarters library and there are two children's librarians in the branches who operate independently. All children's services staff members, along with administrative personnel, serve on the Children's Services Council, which meets regularly to coordinate such events as a storytelling festival or puppet show for National Library Week every April, an annual summer reading club program, and Children's Book Week events each November. From time to time other special projects are undertaken as well.

In the winter of 1988 we took on the task of developing a set of written guidelines for children's programmers to follow. There were several reasons behind our decision to do this:

1. With an expanding staff, a written document would serve as a training tool for new children's librarians as they enter the library system, and could assist paraprofessional employees who may occasionally be called upon to conduct programs.

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2. The guidelines would form the basis for a series of workshops to train such staff members and any interested library employees from beyond Cumberland County.

3. A set of formal guidelines would document what we do in children's services and provide comprehensive coverage that could parallel other sets of policies and procedures produced by our library system (in such areas as reference services and collection development). This system has a strong tradition of documenting the hows and whys of its operations.

4. The process of developing such guidelines would provide us with an opportunity to debate, clarify, and establish our philosophies of children's programming. It would also set the stage for integrating the broadened variety of viewpoints which have accompanied the recent changes in staffing.

A five-member committee was organized for the project: Lydianne Bulazo (Branch Librarian at the Bordeaux Branch Library), Marsha Grove (Head of Extension Services), Julie Hunter (Children's Librarian at the Bordeaux Branch Library), Jennifer Timmerman (then Children's Librarian at the Headquarters Library and now at the Kenton County Library in Erlanger, Kentucky), and myself (Children's Librarian and Branch Librarian at the Eutaw Branch Library).

Our initial list of programming elements attempted to cover all system offerings, both regular and periodic. The list was expansive and the final document threatened to be unwieldy. Therefore, to simplify its organization and add to its ease of use, we settled on an outline format for use within each section.

The guidelines were to begin with an introductory section on the various types of programs that we offer, the age groups for which each is designed, the value of such programs for the developmental skills of children, and ideas for planning successful programs. Following that would be coverage of specific programming areas,

including art projects, costumes, creative dramat-ics, draw and tell/cut and tell stories, fingerplays, flannelboard stories, music, picture books, props, puppets, traditional storytelling, unifying program elements, and audiovisual materials. Within each programming topic's outline we would include: 1. a definition of the activity, 2. a list of its benefits to children, 3. examples of the available range within the area, and 4. performance hints. (See Program Topic Outline at end of article.)

Julie Hunter, Jennifer Timmerman, and I, being the three full-time programmers on the committee, did the actual writing of the guidelines (with Lydianne Bulazo later formatting the pages for consistency). Each of us chose to write up the areas in which we most enjoyed working or were most experienced. Our parts were written individually and then routed to all committee members for comment.

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Later, the entire committee met and went through the composite document line by line, discussing each point and suggesting additions, deletions, or word changes as necessary. In most areas, we found that additional items were quickly agreed upon and our collective experience in children's programming allowed us to produce fairly comprehensive coverage of each programming element. Such a broad scope, particularly in our listing of "hints for use," makes the guidelines extremely valuable for inexperienced staff members, offering them a variety of ideas from which to choose.

The major philosophical bone of contention concerned the use of props with picture books. Some felt that props distracted children's attention from a story while others believed that the use of props would enhance the child's enjoyment. We settled on a brief statement reflecting these opposing views which precedes the listed benefits for the use of props.

Beyond our coverage of specific programming materials and techniques, we felt that this manual would also be the appropriate forum for a discussion of other issues of concern to children's programmers. Therefore, we included an explanation of evaluation procedures, for our library

system has developed forms with which supervisors may evaluate programmers' performances, and surveys by which the public can evaluate the programs that we provide.

We also included material on the visits that are made annually to promote our summer reading club in area schools, and we attached several appendices. These include model letters for parents and teachers which explain the age restrictions and length guidelines for various types of programs and cite our "safe child" policy, copies of our evaluation forms, and an extensive bibliography of published materials on a variety of topics relevant to children's programmers.

One particularly useful section addresses common dilemmas which are faced by children's programmers, such as how to handle adults who are noisy during a children's program, late arrivals who disrupt programs, children who behave badly, infants who are brought into programs, and visiting school groups that either show up unannounced, habitually arrive late, or request a special program and then neither come to it nor telephone to cancel.

The entire *Children's Programming Guidelines* were completed in time for inclusion in the December 1988 updated version of the *Cumberland County Public Library and Information Center Procedures Manual*. Revisions will be made as necessary, but we have attempted to make the document open-ended and flexible enough to accommodate a variety of individual viewpoints, tastes, and styles.



In January of 1989 a new committee was formed, consisting of Marsha Grove (Head of Extension Services), Gail Terwilliger (Head of the Headquarters Library Children's Department), and myself. Our role is to begin phase two of the project: the development of staff workshops which are to be based on the completed guidelines.

Our tentative plans call for bimonthly workshops, each two to three hours long, with similar activities grouped together for coverage during a single day's session. This would mean that each workshop would cover a fair amount of material without overwhelming the employees for whom it is intended. Our goal is to cover all topics within the space of one year. A pilot workshop on the use of picture books in programming debuted in March 1989.

The experience of participating in this entire project has been an enriching one, helping all of us to articulate what it is that we do and how it is that we do it. It allowed us to examine skills that we have come to use almost instinctively. It has encouraged us to think through processes and list their salient points for the benefit of current and future practitioners of these arts. The development of formalized, written guidelines for children's programmers is recommended to any library system.

For a copy of the Cumberland County Public Library and Information Center's *Children's Programming Guidelines* please contact:

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Program Topic Outline

Puppets

Definition

- any character or object brought to life via movement and/or speech

Benefits

- adds an element of fun and excitement
- helps hold children's attention
- gives visual variety to a program
- brings stories to life
- can interact with children and encourage participation
- can be less threatening for children than adults; this varies with the individual child
- can draw out shy children
- can be cuddly
- can lead to activities and introduce themes or stories
- can spark imaginative role playing and self-expression in children

Examples

- finger puppets, two or three dimensional
- hand puppets (sock, glove, plush-bodied, etc.)
- stick or rod puppets
- shadow puppets (with use of a curtain or overhead projector)
- cone puppets
- marionettes
- muppets
- giant body puppets which hook onto your hands and feet

Hints for Puppets for Use in Formal Shows

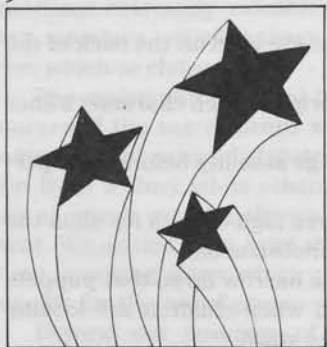
1. Keep each puppet moving to the rhythm of its dialog.
2. Keep puppet low enough so that puppeteer's arm is not visible.
3. Keep the puppet moving *a bit* when it's reacting to the dialog of others.
4. When possible, choreograph the puppets' interactions with each other.
5. Keep the puppet standing straight, not slumped over or leaning forward or backward.
6. Try adding songs to the script, and choreograph them to add variety to the show.
7. Have other staff members critique the performance during rehearsals.
8. Allow two months rehearsal time, and rehearse several times to perfect the performance.
9. Hang the script at eye level on the back of the curtain.
10. Color code the script so each character's lines are easily found.
11. Double check stage stability before each performance.
12. Have the stage area high enough for all in the audience to see unobstructed.
13. Use a stage with a narrow lip so that puppets are not obscured when children are looking up at the lip of the stage.
14. Set the curtain far enough back from the stage lip so that arm movements will not constantly cause movement of the curtain.
15. Be sure lighting is adequate behind the stage for script reading.

16. Be sure the curtain material is heavy enough so that the performers are not visible to the audience.
17. Have a staff member assigned to monitor the audience's behavior as the puppeteers cannot see or respond to the children. Monitor behavior to prevent children from blocking other children's views, grabbing at the puppets, etc.
18. Vary the puppets' costumes.
19. Use interesting, but simple, backdrops which will not distract from attention to the puppet.
20. Keep scenes very short, and vary characters, choreography, and pace frequently.
21. Position yourself and the stage to minimize the discomfort resulting from staying in one position and holding your arms up for long periods of time.
22. Have puppets pop on and off the stage often enough for you to bring an arm down behind the stage, for flexing and to relieve cramping.
23. Vary characters' voices, manners of movement, and personalities so that each character is unique.
24. Keep the plot simple.
25. The number of characters on stage should be no more than the number of available puppeteer hands.
2. Puppets may pop up over the top of a book at pertinent points in the story, if not distracting to the story.
3. Finger puppets may be stuck onto and removed from a glove with bits of velcro as a story is told.
4. Puppets may be clipped to a clothesline as an add-on story is told.
5. Puppets may introduce a program or certain elements of it, and may lead activities.
6. Puppets may sing songs, with or without recorded music in the background, but should always sing "live" to hold the children's attention.
7. Children may take on puppet roles in a story, or perform ad-libbed skits with puppets.
8. Preplan when and how puppets will be used in a program.
9. Have the puppets laid out in advance in the order in which they will be needed.
10. Rehearse the coordination of the puppets with the books, and rehearse each puppet's voice, movements and character.
11. Puppets may be purchased or may be made from any scrap materials, such as socks and cloth bits.
12. Even two-dimensional pictures glued onto sticks can become serviceable stick puppets.
13. Keep puppets hidden from the children's view until the appropriate moments.
14. Puppets are great as the unifying program element for a series of programs, and can wear costumes appropriate to the program's theme.

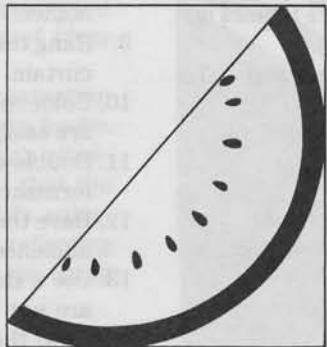
Hints for Puppets for Informal Use

1. One programmer may read a book while a second programmer acts out the story with puppets.

J U L Y



A U G U S T



S E P T E M B E R

