

**L535: Library Services  
for Children and Young Adults**  
Spring, 2003  
Sarah Wright, Instructor

**Observations: Children**

Abbie Anderson

**Program 1:** Martin Luther King, Jr. Day READ OUT and Dream Chain

**Age-group:** Mixed ages; mostly younger children observed attending

**Place:** Monroe County Public Library ground-floor atrium

**Date/Time:** Mon. 1/20/03, 9:30am – 6:00pm (observed approximately 2pm-4pm)

Two programming components, both somewhat informal and continuous throughout the day, were offered as part of the city of Bloomington's "A Day On, Not a Day Off" program for Martin Luther King Day. The READ OUT consisted of volunteers reading multicultural and historical books to children in the atrium. A cozy "living room" setting was created with a colorful carpet, chairs and a bench for the audience, along with pillows for the floor, and the reader seated in a rocking chair. Volunteers also staffed the Dream Chain table in the corner between the elevators and the A/V room, where children and adults could write their own dreams or ideas of freedom onto construction paper strips that were then stapled as links in a paper chain. This chain was later presented at the city's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebrations that evening.

While I was there, a rapt audience of about twelve children plus their caregivers attended the book readings, the children aged from about three to about ten, but weighted toward the younger end of that range. The Dream Chain table was less well attended while I was there, but by that time (the afternoon) there were about 40 links in the chain. A couple older kids (age ten or twelve) wrote their freedom links while I was at the table talking with the volunteers (and writing my own link).

I spoke with Ginny Richey, head of the Children's Department, about how the program was arranged and how it had gone throughout the day. She was pleased with the turnout, and with the performance of the volunteers. Most of the volunteers were I.U. students; Ginny had advertised on IU's "Big Board", and got a very strong response. The program itself was advertised on the front page of the Children's Department flyer of January/February 2003 Events & Programs, and also via the usual outlets such as local radio stations and community access television. Turnout was steady throughout the day, but never overwhelming. Ginny had selected a range of books for the READ OUT, and each volunteer picked his or her own book to read from that pool. Interest in the books was high, and by all accounts the program met its goals "to raise multicultural awareness while promoting literacy." While not actively directing the program, Ginny kept an eye on things during the day to be sure the volunteers arrived and knew what to do.

I also spoke with the volunteers staffing the Dream Chain table. Of the three of them, two had participated in the same event last year. They had all signed up as a result of the "Big Board" advertisement, which they had heard about through their sorority and fraternities. They told me they enjoyed seeing what the children would write when asked "What is your dream for the world?" Answers ranged from the philosophical ("that nobody should hate anybody") to the somewhat self-centered ("I will be a basketball star"). The volunteers I spoke with did not engage the children directly about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ideals.

This program is a good example of how the library can rely on volunteers to make special events happen that would not be possible with normal staff levels. Ginny was very successful in finding volunteers and organizing the events. One of the pitfalls of relying on volunteers was also in evidence, however, which was inconsistent performance. Some of the volunteer readers were great with the kids and enthusiastic about the books they were reading; others were less experienced with reading aloud or showing picture books, and were less inspiring (and harder to follow). The volunteers I spoke with at the Dream Chain table were cheerful and enthusiastic, but were there essentially to do a good deed for their greek organizations (they were all sorority and fraternity members), and were not well informed about Martin Luther King, Jr.

The event was a success in drawing people to the library on a holiday, stimulating interest in books, engaging people in a community activity, and demonstrating the library's ties to that community through its participation in the city-wide "A Day On, Not a Day Off" program. This was definitely a program to raise the library's image and build goodwill. The READ OUT component did an especially good job of creating a welcoming, homey atmosphere in the library. If the library has sufficient time and staff, some brief training for the volunteers (and possibly some MLK-related bibliographies and posters for the Dream Chain table to encourage more "on-target" discussion) might help this kind of program to shine even more brightly.

**Event 2:** Year of the Sheep: Lunar New Year Celebration

**Age-group:** Mixed school-age; mostly ages 6-8 observed

**Place:** Monroe County Public Library Auditorium and Meeting Rooms 1B & 1C

**Date/Time:** Sat. 2/1/03 2pm-4pm (observed entire event)

This program represents an annual collaboration with the Asian Cultural Center of Indiana University. This year marked the sixth year of the collaboration, which was originally instigated by the Asian Cultural Center since they lacked adequate programming space of their own. Patty Callison of the MCPL Children's Dept. was the library's coordinator for the event.

The program opened with performances in the Auditorium, emceed by Patty Callison. Mary Frasier of MCPL told a Chinese tale about a poor couple who find a pot that duplicates anything you put in it (including people). Two Korean children (a boy and a girl) modeled traditional New Year costumes and demonstrated proper bowing techniques. Representatives from the Asian Cultural Center performed a Korean mask dance, Chinese er-hu (bowed lute) music, and a Chinese sword dance. All of these performances were exciting and well received, with a large audience in the hall.

The program then moved to Meeting Rooms 1B & 1C, where students from the Asian Cultural Center ran craft tables for the children to make mock firecrackers, a mini dragon stick puppet, lamb origami, Chinese yo-yos, decorative Chinese lanterns, and Korean noisemakers. A traditional Korean game of chance was also demonstrated, which the

children could play. Visitors were greeted at the door by students handing out flyers briefly describing the diversity of Lunar New Year traditions throughout Asia, and outlining the crafts and games. The library provided a table of books on Asian cultures, focusing on New Year traditions. For the last hour, Asian delicacies were moved in to the craft room from the adjacent kitchen, and were quite the hit.

This event was extremely well attended, and enthusiastically as well. A good mix of Asian and non-Asian kids participated, with an average age of about eight years. An assistant at the Asian Cultural Center selected the crafts for the program, and the ACC also provided the materials and volunteers for the craft tables.

I got to talk with Patty about the planning that went into the program, and helped transfer the food to the Meeting Rooms. Patty was delighted with the turnout, if a bit overwhelmed by the controlled chaos of the craft room. Classmate Sarah Sparks and I both converged on Patty, and she graciously shared with us what had gone into the planning and production of this event. The Asian Cultural Center did most of the actual work in preparing and presenting the details of this program, while the library provided space, coordination, book and story tie-ins, and promotion through the usual outlets.

This event has been a fruitful collaboration with the university-based Asian Cultural Center. Collaborations like these bring talent and resources into the library, easing burdens on library staff while promoting the library both as an exciting place to be, and as a place with a life and meaning outside of its own walls. Building ties with other organizations, and welcoming them into library space, is an important tool of outreach, and benefits everyone involved—especially the community, which gets to participate in activities that would not have been available without the partnership. Both the library and the partner organization have the opportunity to reach audiences who might not otherwise think of them as accessible (or perhaps think of them at all).

**Program 3:** Seusspicious Behavior (Dr. Seuss birthday celebration)

**Age-Group:** 3-9 years and families

**Place:** Monroe County Public Library Meeting Rooms 1B & 1C, & Auditorium

**Date/Time:** Saturday, 3/1/03, 1:00-4:00p.m. (volunteered and observed 12-3; volunteering in Preschool Exploration Center 3-5)

This event represents another collaboration for MCPL, this time with Bloomington Parks & Recreation as part of a Read Across America birthday celebration for Dr. Seuss. This is the second year for an ongoing annual event. Once again I was able to attend a mixed-age event that attracted mostly younger children. I will try to attend a program for older children, but will not be able to report on it before the deadline for our Children's Observations.

Activities for this event were divided between 2 rooms, one hosted by Bloomington Parks & Rec and the other run by the library. Parks & Rec featured several activities, including face-painting, a life-size Dr. Seuss trivia game with the children as playing pieces, a Green Eggs and Ham relay race, and a make-your-own bow-tie craft (like the Cat & the

Hat). The library room featured a craft for making a small book, with folded paper and one strategic scissors cut, and then coloring the book on a separate table (see instructions, attached). Pages to color in were also provided for smaller children or those who would not want to make a book. Dr. Seuss books were also read by volunteers to small audiences using the Program Room “story carpet” to mark off one corner of the room. Both rooms featured a selection of prominently displayed Dr. Seuss books that were available to check out (and were).

In the library auditorium, a 20-minute, 3-person production of “The Lorax” was performed four times during the course of the program. This production was organized by Parks & Rec, directed by Don Johnson. The performers were two children and one teen, and they made the props and set decorations themselves—very impressive, and a lot of fun.

The Parks & Rec room was understandably more boisterous than the library’s, what with all the activities going on. Volunteers in that room took a head count of attendees on every half hour and hour. Ginny Richey supervised the library room, with several volunteers (primarily SLIS students from L535—ahem). Ginny told me that the planning for this event for its first year (last year) took a great deal of effort at the Library, but that this year had been much easier.

As a library volunteer, I can report that we had very little preparation—but that much more would probably not have been necessary. Ginny called most of us the day before the event itself (I had made the mistake of giving her my home phone, and wasn’t there for the call). On the day of, we were shown the craft, and advised to pick a book to read out loud. Most of my fellow volunteers had come with a book in mind, although there was some trepidation about the length of the usual Dr. Seuss book. Ginny was in and out of both rooms throughout the program, encouraging us and providing her usual smiling, calm presence. It took some time for people to filter into the library room from the Parks & Rec room (where all the overtly “fun stuff” was), so several of us were “released” to go watch the first production of “The Lorax” (including myself).

Most of the readers of Dr. Seuss books found they didn’t have much of an audience. I was a lucky one. One child very deliberately handed me a particular book, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, and despite not being so familiar with that one I must have done all right, because as soon as I was done another child demanded more and handed me *I Can Lick 30 Tigers Today*. I had about eight children aged 3-8 in my audience (which went in and out a bit), with some parents sticking around as well. It was a lot of fun.

The entire event was very well attended, including “The Lorax”—which had several repeat audience members. Whole families attended, per the advertisement for “Ages 3-9 and families”, and there were several infants as well as preschoolers on up. This is clearly an enjoyable and meaningful program, a productive collaboration well worth repeating every year.