

Best Practice Portfolio

LIS 723: Services to Children and Young Adults

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Table of Contents

Self-Assessment	1
Magnetic Makey Makey Mazes	2
Read to Feed - Summer Reading Program	3
HiTech, a Learning Lab	4
Sensory Story Time	5
Early Reader Backpacks/Kits	6
Spy Club	7
Statement of Professional Service Philosophy	8

Self-Assessment

When I was promoted to teen library associate from a page at Chicago Public Library, I had recently completed the Master of Fine Arts program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, started summer classes at Dominican University for an MLIS, and I was working three jobs just to get by. While I had experience teaching 18-19 year-olds at college-level, I had never really worked with children or younger teens in a professional setting, so I was a little nervous about my new job. My only hope was that my education and experience in writing, art, and teaching adults would benefit my interactions with teens. Thankfully, CPL placed me at a small, quiet library on the south side of Chicago. While we were short-staffed and I had to take a temporary place as both the teen *and* children's librarian during the hectic-ness of the summer reading program as well as help supervise and co-teach programs with the mobile Maker Lab, I never really felt overwhelmed. Instead, I felt... *great*. It felt right, like this was where I wanted to be. At times it was stressful, but I never felt like anything was out of my control. In fact, I often felt like I wasn't doing *enough*. I wanted to do more.

With the help and approval of my branch manager, I moved the teen fiction and nonfiction to a corner of the library where I saw teens regularly hanging out and I turned that space into a teen space, adding posters, artwork, and accessible teen flyers and college information. I also separated the graphic novels from the children's and teens' nonfiction and placed them on the shelves near the computers and tables so the comics became more visible and within easy reach. Each month I added at least one or more programs on top of what I was expected to do, and I tried hard to contact local high schools for outreach.

This is where I've stumbled on my biggest problem: outreach. I can't seem to get any of the local high schools to care. Many of the teens I see in the library, or who volunteer at our library, attend high schools downtown. I know I need to reach the local teens who I'm not seeing at my branch and I'd like to know what I might be doing wrong, what other methods I could use to spark interest from the local high schools, and the best ways to go about finding other places where the teens might be hanging out so I can meet them there.

Also, while I now work with teens, middle-schoolers, and often 7-12 year-olds, I really think it would be in my interest to learn more about working with young and very young children. Knowing how to do storytimes, how to interact with parents, and how to book talk or do reader's advisory with children's literature would benefit me not only as a teen library associate who often works with younger children, but also in the future if I wanted to apply for a position as a children's librarian at Chicago Public Library, or anywhere else.

What I hope is that this course will allow for me to step out of my comfort zone and, with the help of my peers and my instructor, feel more confident and comfortable working with children, garner new ideas about outreach and ways to implement them, and enhance my understanding of how children and teens develop educationally and what we can do as librarians to help them the most.

Magnetic Makey Makey Mazes

Maker Jawn - Free Library of Philadelphia

<https://makerjawn.makes.org/thimble/magnetic-makey-makey-mazes>

This STEM/STEAM-based program is for children and teens. The goals of the program are to teach conductivity, allow for technology-tinkering and experimentation, and encourage imaginative problem-solving and critical thinking through the step-by-step creation of conductive mazes using Squishy Circuits, Makey Makey, LED lights and alligator clips. The users are asked to first create their own maze/dungeon/map as a simple drawing. After that, they use conductive play-doh and alligator clips to recreate their maps. Lastly, using the Makey Makey, the clips, and a computer, the users can manipulate a “player” through the maze, creating a fun game for other groups to try. A librarian/staff guides the users through the steps and resources are provided online as well.

The complexity of this program and potential for learning on top of looking quite fun and engaging makes this a great intensive technology-based program that could work for a multi-generational audience. The children and teens will gain 21st Century skills in communication and collaboration as well as technology literacy through learning about electricity as well as computer science. There are also multiple STEAM elements to the program; science (electricity), technology (computers, Makey Makey), engineering (manipulating the clay, wires, and Makey Makey into the mazes), art (drawing/creating the mazes/dungeons), and math (creating and keeping a score board).

For my own programming, Magnetic Makey Makey Mazes is a great inspiration and starting point for me to create my own technology-based STEAM program that can be challenging and fun as well as rewarding. As we learned this semester, STEAM and 21st Century skills are fundamental goals to incorporate into library programming.

Read to Feed - Summer Reading Program

Glen Ellyn Public Library

<http://gepl.org/2015/03/gepl-kids-community-partnership-helps-us-feed-our-hungry-neighbors>

This summer reading program is for children, teens, and adults. The goals of the program include: increasing the reading challenge for children and adults, provide incentives for completion and sign-up as well as an ultimate incentive of helping out the local food pantry to feed local disadvantaged community members. Through a collaboration with the Northern Illinois Food Bank, Glen Ellyn Public Library hosted free lunches June 15th through August 7th for anyone under 18, no questions asked. This allows the library to provide needed assistance to disadvantaged youth who depend on free school lunches. The program itself is structured into three groups: birth to 8th grade, teens, and adults. Each are given a different reading goal for the summer with children and teens being based on minutes read while adults are restricted to books.

By providing not only an incentive for children and adults to provide charitable help for the food pantry, but also by providing a direct service to children and young adults with free lunches at the library all summer this library program is a wonderful way to allow the community to help itself as well as make an immediate and meaningful impact on the lives of local disadvantaged families. We hear and read about children who are too hungry to focus on learning or reading but this program actually does something about it. By incorporating something similar at my library, I would be able to help the community and the children beyond just the "summer slide." I can address another, very important issue: hunger. In our course, we've talking about the importance of articulating the value of youth services. This Read to Feed summer reading program would be a wonderful, impactful way of not only articulating, but *showing* the community members how important the library can be for children and young adults.

HiTech, a Learning Lab
Howard County Library System
<http://hclibrary.org/index.php?page=691>

HiTech Learning Academy is geared towards teens, but there are elementary and adult programming as well. The typical programming ages range from 11-18. The goals of the program include: STEM education-focus for teens with innovative, technology-based programming and Maker-space. Through the space, the library offers STEM courses and Maker studio time for teens. The teens can learn from a vast array of technology courses ranging from robotics, computer programming, gaming apps, weather balloons, and music/video production. Teens can register for classes online or, with some classes, can simply drop in for an open math, science, or hangout studio (where they can play games or learn some fundamentals about game design).

As an award-winning example of an innovative maker/technology program, the HiTech Learning Lab is an impressive approach to providing 21st century skills, STEM programming, and a cool place for teens to hang out, geek out, and experiment. The programming is enticing to teens as well as adults. The setup of the website, the classes, and the learning lab does not feel “dumbed-down” to teens. I also especially like that the age requirement extends to include as young as eleven year-olds, unlike YOUmedia at Chicago Public Library which restricts its users to ages 14-18. This allows for higher attendance, family involvement, and exposure to intensive but cool STEM programming at an earlier age. In this course we talked about the appeal and the possibilities of Maker Spaces and this Learning Lab embodies many of the possibilities that a tech-based space has to offer.

Sensory Story Time

Pasadena Public Library

<http://hometown-pasadena.com/good-deeds/sensory-story-time/95963>

This program is for young children on the autism spectrum and their parents/caregivers. The goal of the program is to provide a story-time that is tailored to the specific needs of autistic children: incorporating more movement, flexibility, activities that cover multiple senses, and music. The story time is arranged similar to traditional, except that there is more movement, more focus on a visual schedule, and activities specifically appeal to the developmental stages of a child with autism as opposed to a neurotypical child.

For children on the autism spectrum, loud noises, large crowds, too much sitting, and other traditional methods for story time are counterproductive to providing an adequate and accessible story time. By allowing for flexibility, sensory-based activities, and free movement, they can better address the needs of these children and their parents and create an inclusive atmosphere for these families. As the older sibling to three boys with autism, I am always thinking about how I would create a story time or program for autistic children (or be flexible in what I expect from an autistic child in a group program) and using sensory-based activities is something I would definitely consider. In our discussions about early learning and child development, we talked about the importance of making sure that your programs were “right” for the children so they weren’t overwhelmed with activities and reading too advanced and to keep them from getting bored with anything too easy or young for them. With children on the spectrum it is especially important to find that balance so that they can learn the skills they need at the pace they are capable of understanding.

Early Reader Backpacks/Kits
Geauga County Public Library

<http://geaugalibrary.net/newsite/component/content/article/28-gcpl-news/446-early-reader-backpacks-available-for-checkout-at-gcpl>

This service is for young children and their parents/caregivers. The goal of this program is to provide families with materials to use at home to help teach their early readers. The library hopes that these kits will help early readers become more school-ready. The kits include a book and a game that reinforces some of the themes in the book. There are science and STEM-based kits with nonfiction work as well as fiction. The kits can be checked out for three weeks and the program is funded by the Geauga County Library Foundation.

This program is not only great for school-readiness in early readers; it's also a great resource for homeschool parents and preschools. At my library, we already have early learning backpacks that can be checked out to patrons, but I feel that they are outdated and need some increased focus as well as advertisement. I think many parents don't even know that this service exists. Having a hand-made kit-version of a story time for parents to take home would be wonderful to incorporate into the weekly story time. As we learned in class, many children who are not taught how to read at home by their parents and caregivers fall behind their advantaged peers when they go into kindergarten and first grade. Giving parents/caregivers these tools can help them prepare their children for school and encourage their growth as readers.

Spy Club

St. Charles City-County Library District

<http://showmelibrarian.blogspot.com/2012/11/spy-club-school-age-program.html>

This program is for school-age children. The goals and objectives include: highlighting the collection (specifically spy-themed middle grade novels), providing children with a play-focused set of activities that involve a lot of movement, creativity, critical-thinking, and low-tech crafting and language coding. The program was co-organized by teen volunteers. Several spy-themed activities were set up, including: a tape laser field, a nerf-gun sharpshooting contest, invisible ink, and cryptography. The librarian book talked and displayed relevant books while the children enjoyed the activities.

Fun, exciting, and low-tech, this program is an awesome way to bring in a lot of middle-grade and younger children who may be reluctant to read or find traditional book talks and book clubs boring. This is very inspirational, since it is not only a cool set of activities: they can all be tied into books in the collection! I would take this idea and apply it to other themes as well, like superheroes or scary monsters around Halloween. Relevant non-fiction and craft books can be set up amongst the crafts and each activity can be related back to a piece of fiction, garnering interest. One of my favorite topics we've discussed in this class is *play* and how children learn through play. What is a cooler way to relive your favorite book than by literally acting it out with friends? Even for the kids who have already read the spy books set out amongst these cool activities, they'll retain more knowledge and understanding of the texts through acting them out.

Statement of Professional Service Philosophy

As a youth services librarian, my goal is to provide the children and young adults in my community with a safe and inviting space, information and technology literacy tools, opportunities to interact and collaborate, and the freedom to explore, experiment, and learn through play. It is my mission to provide accessible, fun, and interactive programming that encourages children, tweens, and young adults to not only read the books in our collection but also, importantly, to enhance their 21st Century skills through STEAM-based programs and through open-studio opportunities to play with technology (such as computers, tablets, game systems, etc.) With the growth of the Maker and Hacker movements, libraries have an invested interest in allowing their patrons the space and materials to learn, create, and discover, and this applies to children and teens as much as adults.

For children and teens who are underprivileged and underserved, exposure to technology they may not be able to access at home or at school is essential. Without these modern tools or opportunities, they may fall behind and become lost or discouraged when entering the workforce or college after high school. Through technology and STEAM-programming, I can “level the playing ground” for these children in a way that allows them freedom to learn and explore at their own pace.

It is also important that libraries provide programming and accessibility for children and teens with special needs as well as helpful information for parents. For youth on the autistic spectrum, sensory-based programs and technology applications allow for more inclusive story times and programming while also reaching a growing, but sadly underserved demographic. For parents and caregivers, it is my job to provide them with the tools and materials to help their children grow, which I can accomplish through guided story times, helpful tips, and learning materials or kits that can be checked out and used outside of the library.

Outreach and collaboration are also essential goals for a youth services librarian and should always be a priority. I cannot help the youth and adults in my community if I cannot get them into the library. Working with local schools, youth centers, preschools, and community centers is the most effective way to reach out, gauge interest, open opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, and address the needs of the community.

Art, technology, games, and helping the underserved and underprivileged are my passions. My education in art, creative writing, and criticism provide an authoritative foundation for my programming and allow me to apply my knowledge and experience to guide patrons towards their goals. Whether I am working at the reference desk, performing outreach, teaching high school classes about our online databases, or leading programs and unprograms, my goals stay the same. I am here to provide all children and young adults the opportunities they deserve, the tools they need, and the freedom to have *fun*.