

Music for Every Storyteller
Dr. Evelyn Avoglia

Dr. Ev led a roomful of librarians through a lively, participatory program that blended a delightful performance with the rock solid assurance of someone who is an authority in her field of study. She opened the session with a tune on her harmonica and then moved right into an old Ella Jenkins welcome song. Within a minute she had the group singing, tapping, following hand gestures and introducing themselves in song.

Dr. Ev paused to ask participants what they most wanted to learn. “How to use rhythm sticks”, “Finding the right note to start singing on”, “Songs and games for middle school kids”, “Some universal advice for a successful program” were some of the responses.

After giving some “universal advice” (use a breath and a pause to direct the attention and focus of a group, or to change the tempo of an activity) Dr. Ev demonstrated songs and activities that explored different components of music and addressed the groups’ questions.

Rhythm - Get your body into it. Slap your knees; move your torso. Children need to see rhythm.

Tempo - Do a familiar motion rhyme at normal speed, then slow it down with large slow motions and a deep voice, then speed it up with super fast motions and a high squeaky voice (think Alvin and the Chipmunks).

Pitch – Sing where you are comfortable. Adults can’t usually match children’s small high voices so don’t try. Use noise games like a motorcycle sound starting low and “revving” to high instead of singing. This gives children a change to play with pitch without worrying about being in tune.

Timbre - Help children notice the different quality of sounds. For example the same note sounds different on a piano than it does on a saxophone.

Volume - Loudness is subjective. Decibels are objective. Use a quiet voice to focus attention.

She stressed that you don’t have to be musical to give children an experience of music and sound and that parents should participate in singing and movement. “Your real audience is the parent. They need to check their dignity at the door. Young children will pattern themselves on their parent; they don’t really care what you (as the program leader) are doing.”

The program concluded with a discussion/demonstration of using music in program transitions. “What ever you want children to do just tell them; but tell them with music. It works much better than talking at them”. With that, Dr. Ev (who must be related to the Pied Piper) got the group singing, marching in a circle, lining up by twos, waving bye bye and marching out the door before they quite knew what hit them.

Two resources mentioned during the program were:

Rise up singing: the group singing songbook / conceived, developed & edited by Peter Blood & Annie Patterson; illustrated by Kore Loy McWhirter ; introduction by Pete Seeger. Sing Out Corp. 2004.

Something musical happened at the library : adding song and dance to children's story programs. Rob Reid. American Library Association. 2007.

You can find contact information for Dr. Ev on her page at the Connecticut Muse Art Cooperative:

http://ct-muse.org/music_making_me.htm