

Evaluating Book Reports

There were 881 books read by eighty-one children and thirty-eight families for 1997 to 1998.

Interview with Brenda Wardzala, a student from Northeastern Illinois University, who prepared summary documents describing the distribution of book reports among Even Start families. She also introduced new formats for students to use when writing book reports.



Student fills out book report form (photo above.) The After School program begins in the library where children and parents read together. When a book is finished, a book report is completed by the children and parent. Older children complete the reports on their own. Prizes are rewarded to students who complete these reports.

Books Read Per Family McCosh Even Start 1997-1998 (chart follows)

The chart gives the name of the family and the number of children. Some families had one child, others had three, four, even five children. With this information you can understand better why one family had read ninety books and another family had only read thirty-five. Because of the difference in the number of children (in each family.)

The name of the family is documented with the mother's last name, followed by the children's last name.

Also, there are various families that share a last name. So you can't just assume that the Johnsons belong together, because they may not..

One of my own goals was to help in the reading of books. There is a part of the day that is set aside for the families to go into the library, select books and read together. What we found is that the teachers from the school who are working with the program, did not have enough time to leave their classroom, get upstairs, and be part of that (library reading time.) So what I did was I would go in and if there was a child who was there whose parent was not reading to them, maybe the parent was busy with some other task working for Even Start, I would read to them. I thought it was part of my job to be a model to the parents.

I enjoyed putting together the reports, but more than that I enjoyed working with the families and the children of the Even Start program. And to see how it is all put together. It is not an easy thing to pull off. I have been able to take bits and part of it. The most important is the family. The family working together in activities. The family completing literacy.

Strategies to Improve the Quality of Report Content

I saw a lot of children being read to, but when I looked at the book reports, I don't know how many of them are actually completing the book reports. They might be reading to the children, but not actually completing the book reports. So part of my job was to say, what do we need to do to make the collection of the materials and the completion more likely to occur.

I tried to set up some different forms that were more inviting. So they might be the shape of a child where they would write about a character (in the story.) Or, if it was just a different shape or size of paper. Just something that would make it look a little different, so that children might not become bored with it, and the parent as well.

character form (right)

Technical Features in Assembling Data

I took the reports that were given to me, that were compiled by time periods. Which looked good initially, until I found out that my job was not to compile them by time periods. My job was to compile them by family. So I separated them all and put them into some type of order that I could do, I entered them into a computer and into a spread sheet to get the calculations. And from that, created graphs to visually show what each family had done.

What kind of family patterns did you have?

There were a lot of single mothers who had children by multiple fathers. Which was why it was so difficult for me to find out how the families were compiled. Also there were grandmothers coming to the program with the children, either because the mother was working or because the child was living with the grandmother.

There were two cases where fathers were coming. One was the mother's boy friend, not the father. The mother had found a job, and the boyfriend continued to come with them. So I thought that was good because one of the goals of the program is that the women or the fathers get to work, and in this case that is what occurred. Instead of this (job) being the end (of EvenStart) for this family, it was important enough for the family so that she found someone else to go with the child. This was a successful sign of the program, to see that the services continued for the child.



And another way to encourage it (reading) was with what I call the Blue Ribbon Awards. The children would do this. They don't have to do it for every book, but when they found a book they really liked, it would be available. And they could fill them in and recommend, tell other children, why it is a great book. There is a bulletin board where the children have a side, and they can put them up. And then other parents can see what children like. And be more encouraged to read that book. "Oh another child really liked that, hopefully my child would really like that. And the same for the parents, the parents would have one, they might find a book that they really liked to read to their child. Or a book that they really liked for themselves. It was an adult book. And that might encourage more reading for the parent as well.

Also, to collect the material, it needed to be something simpler, and collected in the way that it is going to be calculated. So that they would be collected in large folders, with all the names of the parent and the children who are participating in the program and filed accordingly. And then on the outside, each child could have a piece of paper that they could keep individual totals for the children per month, or per recording period, or what have you. That way who ever does this in the future would have a very easy job to do. It would be simple. And it would also be very easy for staff to make a chart, a large chart that could be put up in the program so that parents and children can see the results of what they are reading. That can encourage more reading. They see, "Oh I have read ten, I want to read more." Or "My brother read ten, I only read five, I want to read as many as he did." Those sorts of things.

I am just trying to find ways that the materials are not only being collected, but they are also improving the amount and quality of the books being read by the parents and the children.

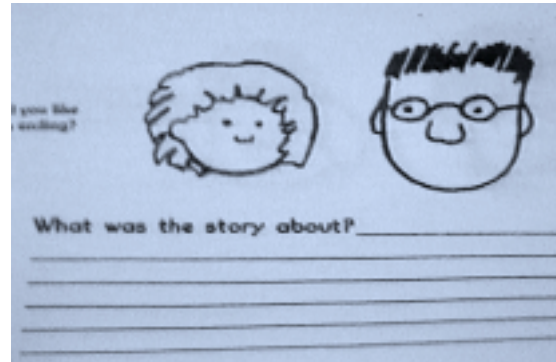
To do a good job, I want to be able to, not just complete the project, but also provide information to make it easier for those who are working with the project, and those that will be compiling the data next time through.

It will take a little bit more time initially, but it will save lots and lots of time. I learned so much by doing the project. How important it is to find a way to collect the information, so that it is easiest to use later. It may seem busy work, but it is part of the work, and it is part of getting the whole job done. So I hope it helps the program in the future.

I wanted to change some of it. (For example) "What was the story about?" instead of "Did you like it?"

That is also part of incorporating the Blue Ribbon Award for the parents and the children. It is okay to have my favorites. To think some books are superior to others.

They had one form that they had used for the whole year. And I think that is one reason I said that we need to make some changes in how it looks. You could see that the title and the author's name were being put on there, but other than that, I was not sure if the children were really answering the questions. They were asked, "Did you like this book?" And to answer they needed to draw a face on this person. And what I noticed was that every one I saw had a smiley face on it.



These were the questions. "Was this a good book?" And I would see a smiley face. "Would you tell a friend about this book?" and there was another smiley face.

For "Draw your favorite thing about the story," probably about 75% of the time that was there. For "Did you like the ending?" and "Did you like the pictures?" again I saw the smiley faces. My idea was that these children should become more critical of the books they are reading. It is okay if you do not like a book. It is okay that you don't like the pictures.



This particular form that I used was designed for a little bit older child. It's called a story frame. You fill in the blanks to re-cap the story. It helps children understand that most stories have a way of unfolding. There is a beginning, a middle and an end. There are characters and they have problems. It helps the parent understand that there is a way that the story is written.

A Story Frame for the book

_____ by

_____.

The story takes place

_____.

_____ is a character in the story who

_____.

Another character is _____.

And in this one, it is a little bit more open ended. It says, "I thought this book was _____ because

_____." So they could say, "I thought this book was horrible." "I thought this book was wonderful." "I thought this books was silly." "I thought this books was scary." "Bcause....." And they always have to give a reason why they are choosing it.

"This is a picture I drew about my book." It doesn't have to be a favorite part. Maybe I don't have a favorite part. Maybe I have too many favorite parts. It is just a picture I choose to draw.



So that is how I was trying to increase the quality of the book reports by giving them different options. Maybe at the beginning of the year they are using something that is relatively simple, they change them during the year so that it is not "Oh I am doing the same thing over again." Or "I know how this thing works, I just put a smiley face on it." Or "I just write this." When you know exactly what the form looks like, sometimes you get lazy and you just answer it really quickly. I was hoping that by giving them these different forms that they would be able to be more critical.

The book reports that are shaped like the boy and the girl are more to do with the characters in the story.



I enjoyed putting together the reports, but more than that I enjoyed working with the families and the children of the Even Start program. And to see how it is all put together. It is not an easy thing to pull off. I have been able to take bits and part of it. The most important is the family. The family working together in activities. The family completing literacy.

So what I did was I take them back to my school. And this is what I want to do. I want to have family literacy nights. I work at a day care center, but I teach kindergarten, and a lot of the families do not have an opportunity to be involved in their child's education because they are working all day. And so what I have brought is that we should do this once or twice a month. There is a literacy component when parents read with their children. And there is a part when a teacher does a poem or a book. And does songs with the children. And then there is an art activity, maybe making a book, and a science activity and maybe a math activity. So that the parents can actually do the activity with the child. And that way you are educating the parent when they do not even realize it.

We preach to the parents. There is a parent meeting, and at the meeting there is a facilitator, and the parents are sitting in the audience. And there may be some dialogue, but they are not really getting the hands-on. And if we expect children to do things hands-on, then I think that is what parents need. That is what Even Start showed me. These parents are becoming highly educated about (at 19:20) how to help their children develop their academic, their social, their emotional, their physical skills. By doing that, they are helping the parents and the children. I wanted to bring that back and work in a similar way with my school. So that is what Even Start has done for me. It has opened my eyes to a different way of helping parents and having parents be involved. Instead of thinking, "What can the parents do for me?" in terms of being involved in school, "How can they make my job better?" It should be, "What can we do together to make the child's life better?" So I am happy to be a part of Even Start, and hope to be in the future.

