

Sensory Storytime: Roadmap, Tools & Ideas

Summary & Bibliography | Laura Baldassari-Hackstaff & Laura Olson

Our Sensory-enhanced storytime is a traditional storytime with sensory enhancements, such as fidgets for the children to hold, sensory balls, dual presentations of a story where we read from the storybook while the volunteer presents the flannel version, scent jars to pass around, and additional opportunities to move. Our storytime is designed to be at a toddler or preschool level of development, while being for all ages of youth on the autism spectrum, differently-abled, and typically developing.

The 5 steps to develop and begin our sensory-enhanced storytime

1. Formed a District Task Force

We began developing our storytime with a District Task Force including Associate Directors, Branch Manager, Youth Department Heads, Community Relations, Training, Volunteer Dept. Head, Branch Volunteer Coordinator, & Youth Librarians. Task force met for 10 months with input from:

- The Autism Society of Colorado (ASC) at <http://autismcolorado.info/>
- Tricia Twaragowski's ALSC blog, *Programming for Children with Special Needs* at <http://tinyurl.com/76hk5pw>
- Our local public school district

2. Developed our resources

-- Storytime Plans: We adapted traditional plans to include sensory elements of double visuals (simultaneous story and flannel), scents, textures, sounds, movements, and interactive elements such as adapted books and storybook images on craft sticks.

-- The space: We changed it according to the Autism Society's recommendations-

No push pins, pencils, paper clips, etc. on floor or any surfaces

No fluorescent light banks on, can lights only plus natural light

No ceiling fans running

Remove or block stacked chairs and other climbing hazards

-- Visual Schedule: Friendly caterpillar face and clip-art images for activities-

Read a Book, Sing a Song, Fingerplay, Flannelboard story, Bubbles, Parachute, etc. You can search "*Visual Schedule*" and find many ideas and resources.

-- Songs repeated at sensory storytime:

Hello Song

Hi, hello, and how are you,

How are you, how are you?

Hi, hello, and how are you,

How are you today?

Choo Choo Name Song

Choo Choo, Choo Choo,

Choo Choo, Choo Choo,

Up the railroad track,

Choo Choo, Choo Choo,

Choo Choo, Choo Choo,

Then we come right back,

First we go to _____'s house,
Then we go to _____'s house,
Then we go to _____'s house,....
Then we come right back.

Sticky Bubble Gum Song, multiple versions on YouTube

Scarf Song, "Shake Your Scarves" by Johnette Downing, *The Second Line* MCD

Bubble Song from *Mailbox Magazine* (tune- Twinkle Twinkle Little Star)

Bubbles floating all around,
Bubbles fat and bubbles round,
Bubbles on your nose and toes,
Blow a bubble, up it goes.
Bubbles floating all around,
Bubbles floating to the ground.

Parachute Song, "Shaky, Shaky" by The Wiggles, *Yummy Yummy* MCD

Goodbye Song

Goodbye, goodbye, we'll see you soon, see you soon, see you soon,
Goodbye, goodbye, we'll see you soon, on another day.

3. Introduced storytime to staff

We introduced staff to the new storytime with the presentation of the Autism Society's Autism 101 informational slideshow, and a demonstration of a sensory storytime, at District-wide Staff Day. We had staff thank us for increasing their confidence when serving patrons with special needs. The Autism 101 presentation was very helpful to us, because it prepared us for our interactions with the children and young adults. If we had not known these signs of autism, we may have misunderstood our participants' actions and felt that storytime was of little value to them.

4. Recruited & trained volunteers

Our Branch Volunteer Coordinator recruited the volunteers and designed their training. The training session included *Autism 101* from the ASC and a demonstration of the volunteers' roles in a sample storytime. We requested a minimum 6-month time commitment from each volunteer.

5. Introduced storytime with Pilot program

We began offering our sensory storytime with a Pilot Program to help us determine the best days and times, our likely audience, understand the effectiveness of each part of the storytime, adjust it based on our experiences and parent recommendations, and develop additional sensory-rich activities. The Pilot ran for 3 months on differing days of the week each month. We welcomed siblings, extended family, and medical therapists. We required an adult to be with participants, but not a one-to-one ratio. During the Pilot we posted our Social Story on our sensory storytime web page. We based our Social Story (<http://DouglasCountyLibraries.org/storytime/sensorystorytime>) on the example we received from the Inclusion Collaborative of the Santa Clara County Office of Education, and we referred all registrants to it in the pre-survey we sent to them. We offered a resource table with information on library programs, local special needs resources, and community events. During the Pilot program, we

decided to cap the storytime attendance at 15, not including parents/caregivers or siblings, and to limit the storytime length to between 20 and 30 minutes.

Universal Design for Learning

Sensory storytime is effective, in part, because it is based on the concept of *“Universal Design for Learning. The precepts [of this concept] are simple: multiple means of representation, engagement, expression, and assessment...By providing children with more than one way to interact with the material, we allow more children to become engaged and provide them with a comfortable point of access... Multiple means of engagement means using their strengths and interests to make a connection between them and the material.”* p. 66

INCLUDING FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. Revised Ed. Carrie Scott Banks. 2014.

Additional Resources

THE AUTISM BOOK: WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT EARLY DETECTION, TREATMENT, RECOVERY, AND PREVENTION. Robert Sears, M.D. 2010.

AUTISM EVERY DAY: OVER 150 STRATEGIES LIVED AND LEARNED BY A PROFESSIONAL AUTISM CONSULTANT WITH 3 SONS ON THE SPECTRUM. Alyson Beytien. 2011.

THE AUTISTIC BRAIN: THINKING ACROSS THE SPECTRUM. Temple Grandin. 2013.

HOW TO TALK TO AN AUTISTIC KID. Daniel Stefanski. 2011.

INCLUDING FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. Revised Ed. Carrie Scott Banks. 2014.

MUSIC FOR SPECIAL KIDS: MUSICAL ACTIVITIES, SONGS, INSTRUMENTS AND RESOURCES. Pamela Ott. 2011.

THE REASON I JUMP: THE INNER VOICE OF A THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD BOY WITH AUTISM. Naoki Higashida. 2013.

THE SPARK: A MOTHER’S STORY OF NURTURING GENIUS. Kristine Barnett. 2013.

TEN THINGS EVERY CHILD WITH AUTISM WISHES YOU KNEW. Ellen Notbohm. 2012.

Sensory storytime videos at: <http://tinyurl.com/k6js4m9> <http://tinyurl.com/l7993fc>

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