Teacher Training Workshop with Parent-Child Mother Goose Program: November 2012
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The Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs offer regularly scheduled sessions where parents and children learn rhymes, songs and stories through oral practice, not by reading, though printed copies are later supplied. Actions often accompany the rhymes/songs, actions ranging from gentle stroking of infants, to more whole-body movements for active four-year olds. Another key component of the program is oral storytelling.

Many positive outcomes are expected from the Mother Goose programs including improved language skills of both the parents and the youngsters, strengthened bonds between parents and their children, and a rise in parents’ confidence to provide positive ways to interact with their children at home.

During the two-day workshop, I and the other participants learned many of the rhymes, songs and stories, just as parents would, through listening and practice. At the end of the sessions we were supplied with printed copies of the verses and stories we had learned as well as copies of many others. Just as parents in the Mother Goose programs gain confidence by practicing, so did I.

GALA’s family literacy program and the Mother Goose program are similar in many ways. Both programs are for the parents, helping parents develop new skills and the confidence to put those skills to practice at home. Both encourage oral communications to help children develop language skills. Both encourage close positive interactions to strengthen family bonds.

However, the two programs differ in many significant ways. First GALA, because of its geography and scattered population, offer programs using many different models. Secondly, the demographics of our families differ; children in GALA’s family literacy program range from newborns to teenagers. This broader age range means that we use a wider range of resources and materials. We do encourage the use of age-appropriate rhymes, songs, poetry, and stories - oral communications in general. Thirdly, books are important to our program. We encourage parents to snuggle up with their children while reading to them, to listen to their children read, to talk about the books they’ve read to one another, and to listen to stories. Fourthly, we also offer a range of math, science and craft activities in many of our packages and sessions.
Benefits: With the Mother Goose training and materials, I will be more confident in modeling the use of rhymes, songs and stories when we have face-to-face family sessions. I now have many more print resources to send in packages to supplement our regular materials. Overall, taking the program has reassured me that GALA is offering the right kinds of resources for the youngest children in our programs.

In addition to the above benefits, I was even more excited by the possibilities that I saw between the oral storytelling and our regular NSSAL programs. Stories were told and retold, practiced, memorized not word for word, but as remembered, embellished and enacted with facial expression, intonation and hand gestures, always following the story line, always using details to create memorable characters and strong visual settings.

Though I haven’t used any of the practiced stories I learned in the Mother Goose program, I have used oral storytelling as a stepping stone to writing with one of my adult classes. All of the members of that class were confident oral storytellers, often relating personal or community stories, but nearly all were reluctant writer. Before Christmas, I told them a story about a memorable Christmas from my childhood, adding a lot of detail. Then I asked them to relate a similar story from their childhood. Generally their stories were sparse. We then read *The Little Match Girl*, followed by a brief summary of the story. We talked about the differences between the original story and its summary, noting the pleasure the actual story had evoked. Next, we all retold our stories, adding detail, drawing in the listeners. Finally, the learners wrote out their own stories.

The learners typed their stories, added favorite Christmas recipes and songs, included suitable graphics and then compiled, printed and bound them all into a booklet, making copies for each member of the class. The learners were so proud and pleased with their efforts and the results.

I am looking forward to another oral storytelling session, this time using some of the stories I learned at the Mother Goose workshop. We will discuss how storytelling is universal, has stood the test of time, and gives us insight into other cultures and times. We will practice good story telling techniques. The session will provide practice in oral communications and in using memory aids; overall a confidence building experience. Equally important, it will be fun and we will enjoy the pleasure of storytelling.