Andie Kantor Bender

Elib 530a

Dr. Bindman

Children’s Librarian Interview

I interviewed Patty Gonzales on a blustery Wednesday afternoon. I had to chase her down to request the interview, as at first she was helping someone on the phone, and then teaching another librarian where certain books were, and finally helping a small child up who had fallen over on her stool. She generously came to sit with me and another grad student as we plied her with our interview questions.

We found that Patty is a charming, retired librarian who volunteers for story time on Wednesday mornings and then stays for the rest of the day to do whatever needs to be done in the children’s section. Currently, there is no children’s librarian at the Mar Vista branch of the Los Angeles Public Library; when Patty retired after working at that site for four and a half years, the position was not filled. Patty is also on the librarian sub list and often subs at children’s literature at the downtown branch.

**What is the population that you serve?**

If they can talk, I serve ‘em. Two years-old is about when they start coming in. I only work with kids up to fifth grade. Mar Vista is a very diverse community, although it’s mostly Caucasian. Hugely Hispanic. We do have some Eastern Asian. I remember some French, English, and Swedish kids. It’s hard to say if they were foreign exchange or moved here with their families. Not many African American kids.

**What selections tools do you use?**

Online resources, mostly. Online Selection Assistant, we call it OSA. Through OSA you can look at various reviews from the literature – *Publishers Weekly*, *Hornbook*. *School Library Journal* is the biggie. Or Amazon and Barnes and Noble will have reviews. Kirkus, Children’s Book Center are also good, but SLJ is the best. People who review for them know children’s literature – they work in public libraries or in schools as children’s librarians. I tend to trust their reviews more than others. We children’s librarians look at books from different eyes than librarians for older people. Each library has a different need, and children’s librarians look at books in a different way from other reviewers.

Downtown puts together a list each month of children’s books, as suggestions for us. Each library has a budget that we can use. We can select books we think will work well in our library. We can also direct purchase from a bookstore. Also, we can put in requests for replacements when books are damaged or stolen.

**Speaking of book selections, do you have *And Tango Makes Three* in this library?**

Yes, I bought *Tango*. I think it’s an important book. It’s in the catalog but not in the library. People do their own censoring.

**What services do you provide for children?**

* Story time-toddler/preschool. This happens every week.
* Summer reading club in the summer for elementary school children.
* Special performers or authors. We will get extra funding from children’s downtown for this.
* School visits – we talk about the library card, what the library offers you, etc. This is arranged with teachers. Or sometimes with principals.
* Homework help – that’s online.

**How do you personally encourage reading?**

I read to them. I talk about books that I have read. When you’re a children’s librarian it’s important to read the children’s lit so that when a child comes in and they want a book you’ll be able to help them from personal experience. I try to show them an assortment of books to read. I’m enthusiastic. I share with them my personal favorites. *The Little House* by Virginia Burton is my very favorite book. It won the 1947 Caldecott and I discovered it in first grade. I used to read it to my own kids and it still made me cry.

**What insights do you have about your job?**

You definitely have to like children. In a public library you really have to like working with people. There are many times there might be situations you might not like. You really have to be tolerant. Not too rigid, you really must be flexible. There are Section 8 people. There are people who don’t know how to use computers. You have to work with people who don’t know what they want, sometimes.

**What challenges do you find in your job?**

People. Fistfights. Messy bathrooms. Children throwing up in the children’s section. People who may have woken up on the wrong side of the bed and/or didn’t take their meds. Not finding something for someone when I’ve looked and looked and looked. Keeping up with the technology – they are constantly upgrading our computer systems. Our budget has gone down, although it’s ok. We still get to buy books. They cut staffing. We have less people here to do the job. We don’t have a children’s librarian here, except me the volunteer and one on loan. Parks and Rec used to cut our lawn and we used to have a janitorial staff, but I don’t know how often either one of them comes here. Oh, and my biggest pet peeve. No cell phones in the library. That’s a big one for me.