

Learning language with music

By Meranda Watling • mwatling@journalandcourier.com • December 22, 2008

Former teacher uses songs to connect with kids

The kids in the Lafayette School Corp. Title I preschool learned a little about song writing and a lot about each other during a program with an educational songwriter last week.

Randy Beard is a former classroom teacher who now works with teachers and students around Indiana in what he calls "learning through lyrical literacy."

Basically, Beard interacts with students to help them pen on-the-spot lyrics and then puts their words to music. Especially for younger kids, it helps them use creativity and build vocabulary. The hope is to inspire an interest in reading and writing as well.

"You think with 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds in this group, they are all at different developmental levels," Beard said during a break between song creation. "But my strategy is to make a connection between language and development with all these kids. It works at any age."

On Thursday, the preschoolers and their parents created a song based on what they like to do. Kids volunteered their favorite activities -- from playing Playstation with siblings to dressing up like a princess -- for inclusion in the song lyrics of "What We Like to Do ..."

Emily Ponce, 3, offered that she likes to "play with her toys and ride ponies." And that line got added to the song.

After going through the room adding everyone to the song, Beard stopped, grew quiet and pointed out the children's accomplishment: "Do you know we just created a song that no one else in the world has ever sung?"

LSC Title I director Jerilyn Smith said she brought Beard into the classroom for the students, many of whom are learning English as a second language, because she had seen his work at past teacher workshops and other schools.

The songs Beard was focusing on with the Title I students incorporated lessons with echoes, rhyming and alliteration. He even read a book with farm animal noises that familiarized the kids with a big term: onomatopoeia.

"This is fun and interactive," Smith said. "But there's a lot of research behind everything he does. It all tries to reinforce lessons they are learning."

The program also helps bashful kids to not be as shy.

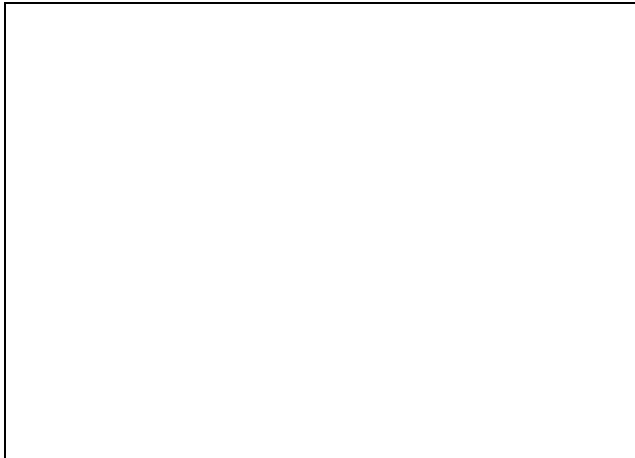
Beard said he tries not to focus on a child who doesn't like the spotlight but often by the end of the day the child is comfortable enough to be up at the microphone singing with him.

When Beard was singing the children's song the kids helped him write, he went around the room inserting different kids', parents' and teachers' names.

"I look through my window, and what do I see ..." he sang. "I see Maddie smiling at me."

Four-year-old Maddie Thoennes hid her face, smiling but embarrassed by the attention. Half an hour later, Maddie was jumping up and volunteering ideas for Beard's song.

She was already familiar with Beard's music from a previous workshop at her old preschool. In fact, she said she was a fan "because he has a funny voice."



By Michael Heinz/Journal & Courier

Musician and educational consultant Randy Beard entertains and teaches children Thursday at the Title I pre-school housed at Evangelical Covenant Church. Beard uses the students' interests and names to help them write songs and teach them language concepts and build vocabulary.