

Tara Heights hosts author Crawford

By Mitchell Warren

Times Staff Writer

Parents and teachers gathered in the gymnasium at Tara Heights Elementary School Thursday evening to listen to children's author Joyce Holton Crawford and learn about the importance of reading with children.

Attendance was sparse, but Crawford, author of "Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down" and "Don't Call Me Michael," offered numerous tips and strategies to help children develop their vocabulary and desire to read.

"The best thing you can do to ensure your child's success is to read aloud to them," she said.

Before the evening assembly, Crawford read to Tara Heights students throughout the day, rotating between grade levels.

Crawford said different children are ready for different books at different times. She advised parents to select reading material that is above, below and "just right" at a child's reading level. This gives them a chance to be read to, read to others and read on their own.

In addition, she said it doesn't matter what books a child is reading compared to other children of the same age — as long as an effort is made to have them read.

"If your child reads this book and my child reads that book, it means absolutely nothing," she said.

"However many minutes you can get in a week, that's time well spent."

She focused on "filling the piggy bank" with words, rather than coins. Anything a parent can do to introduce new vocabulary is worth it, she said. Designing games centered on developing vocabulary or having a "word of the week" are both good strategies.

Finally, turning off the television and making reading material available everywhere is a key factor in developing a child's reading skills, she said. Having magazines, newspapers, books and other materials lying around the house is a good idea. Setting a reading time where the TV is off is also important.

"Make sure they know the reason the TV is off is because the TV is off, not because it is time to read," she said. "They will learn to resent that."

Tara Heights Principal Patricia Zeimet has several active programs that encourage reading. One program, "One School, One Book," has all the students at the school read the same book and includes activities during the year to encourage excitement in the program material.

Last year, students read "Charlotte's Web." Students are currently voting on their which book they will read this year. Students are deciding between "The World According to Humphrey" and "The Lemonade War."



Photo by Mitchell Warren

Parents and teachers took notes while Crawford spoke about the importance of reading to children. The author spent the rest of her day reading to children at the school before the evening presentation.