

ENGAGING CHILDREN WITH LITERACY AT ARMSTRONG BROWNING LIBRARY: AN ARCHIVAL STUDY OF THE CHILDREN'S SUMMER INSTITUTE

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Children's literacy programs, as an extension of community literacy, have the potential to engage children with literacy by either complementing or contrasting school-based literacy curriculum. While many achievement-based literacy programs have been widely studied, fewer studies have focused on the value of enrichment-based approaches. The Children's Summer Institute (CSI), a literacy enrichment program administered by Baylor University's Armstrong Browning Library from 1989 to 1993, aimed to cultivate an interest in literature and writing by exposing the students to the best of children's literature (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). This study investigates what the Children's Summer Institute can teach us about children's literacy and how its model can inform current conversations surrounding literacy. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the Institute, I combined qualitative and textual methodologies, including archival document analysis and outside interviews. I found that the Children's Summer Institute serves as an example of how engaging programming can effectively further literacy and foster an appreciation for literature within a community literacy framework. These results highlight the importance of enrichment-based literacy programs for children, as they can be a valuable complement to traditional school curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

When I was six years old, I scribbled my name onto my brand-new library card with a bright purple pen and the dream of reading my way through the entire children's section, exactly like the character Matilda. Tearing through book after book, I filled up my "Reading with Dogs" punch card within weeks and completed the summer reading challenge every year, receiving a handful of coupons in return. The reward of a free ice cream cone was alluring by

itself, but I would have read ten books all the same. I often ran my fingers down the shelves, scanning for captivating and colorful book spines, although in many cases, I returned to books I had previously enjoyed. While my dream never quite came to fruition, my love for literacy was beginning to bloom. Hardbacks, paperbacks, series, and stand-alone novels alike transported me to other worlds, leaving me with curiosity and awe. I began to write stories of my own, filling up countless journals

with imaginary characters, fictitious events, and made-up dialogue containing elementary school humor.

According to the definition of literacy in the *National Literacy Act of 1991*, which is the “ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential,” I was beginning to develop literacy skills from an early age (*National Literacy Act of 1991*, sec. 3). From bedtime stories to weekly trips to our public library, my parents played an active role in cultivating literacy experiences in my life. These experiences have manifested themselves into a passion for all children to have opportunities to engage with literacy in meaningful ways, both inside and outside of a school environment.

Though the education system provides a framework for children to learn how to read and write in an academic setting, children might not experience the joy of reading and writing for pleasure, therefore missing out on the opportunity to discover how literacy can be a means of escape and a thing of enjoyment. When removed from an academic setting, children are given the freedom to embrace literacy however they want.

While engaging with literacy can occur in the context of a school or home environment, for the purpose of my research, I will be looking at children’s literacy in the context of a children’s literacy enrichment program, which falls under the overarching concept of community literacy. Community literacy can be defined as “the engagement of participants in activities

that nurture discourse—written and spoken communication” (Maddigan and Bloos ix). Literacy programs exemplify community literacy by nature when connecting participants to one another and to literacy activities. Upon discovering the archives in Baylor University’s Armstrong Browning Library (ABL) detailing the Children’s Summer Institute (CSI), one such community literacy program, I was eager to learn more about the program by analyzing its programming and evaluating if it fostered a love for literacy among its participants. By studying this program, I sought to discover what it teaches us about children’s literacy in conjunction with potential applications for children’s literacy practices today. To that aim, this study seeks to answer, at least in part, the following questions:

1. What does the Children’s Summer Institute teach us about children’s literacy?
2. How can findings from the program be applied to conversations surrounding children’s literacy today?

In this article, I present the results of a study that utilizes qualitative and textual methodologies by completing close readings and analyzing archival research materials. In addition, I conducted a few interviews with those associated with the Children’s Summer Institute or with expertise on children’s literacy to supplement the archival research.

Before I discuss the key findings and applicable lessons from the program, I will begin with the rationale and background for this study.

RATIONALE

To frame my research questions, it is important to look at what children's literacy programs have to offer. As opposed to the educational curriculum used on a typical school day, an out-of-school literacy program has the potential to complement, extend, or diverge from the understanding of literacy practices used in a classroom environment (Kirkland and Hull 711). Out-of-school programs can explore new ways for children to engage with literacy beyond the constraints of school requirements. Sometimes, out-of-school environments can help youth experience a "measure of freedom from school-based identities that position them as uncooperative or non-academically inclined, reinventing themselves as engaged participants in learning and their communities" (Kirkland and Hull 721). Out-of-school programs can create new learning environments from which new identities emerge. As programs are structured, literacy programs ought to look at "how literacy can be taught, what methods work best, and how the needs of the target population need to be considered" (Malcolmson 30). By structuring literacy programs in a way that either complements or contrasts literacy practices in the school system, this creates a thoughtful way to approach literacy outside of school.

Children's literacy programs, when created with their community in mind, can include some, if not all, of the following criteria that Beth Maddigan and Susan Bloos laid out in their book *Community Library Programs That Work*. Their criteria for community-focused programs consist of community involvement,

engagement with youth and families, accessibility, support networks, collaboration for mutual benefit, literacy connections, innovation or uniqueness, consideration of place, and potential for replication (xii). For children's literacy specifically, literacy projects such as "Every Child Ready to Read" have laid out a framework of literacy practices and components to include in early literacy programs. The practices include "singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing," while the components include "oral language, vocabulary, background knowledge, print conventions/awareness, letter knowledge, and phonological awareness" (Campana et al. 371). While "Every Child Ready to Read" is one of many early literacy initiatives, it demonstrates the importance of what early literacy programs should offer — addressing literacy needs in a creative, engaging, and participatory way.

However, we have become so focused on looking at literacy from an achievement standpoint that we may have forgotten to approach literacy in a creative and engaging way (Kirkland and Hull 720). While research has focused heavily on achievement-based programs, less attention has been given to enrichment-based approaches like the CSI's, which yielded notably positive results. Therefore, I believe the ABL's Children's Summer Institute is an excellent case study to learn from when examining the value of enrichment-based programming that maximizes engagement between children and literacy practices.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Within the framework of community literacy, many programs create a space where children's literacy can be developed outside of a classroom context, such as community library programs, after-school programs, and university-public library partnerships. Community literacy allows community members to develop their literacy skills in a variety of ways alongside one another (Maddigan and Bloos ix). Since different learning strategies are employed to reach different audiences, community literacy programming itself can vary. However, community library programs are an example of one of the most accessible forms of community literacy by meeting the literacy needs of community members both individually and collectively.

According to the American Library Association, public libraries “bring communities together by creating welcoming and inclusive spaces that increase access to information and support engagement in learning across the lifespan” (qtd. in Taylor et al. 55). Data shows that 61.5% of 3.57 million public library programs have been designed with children in mind, as early development is important for supporting children's literacy (Grimes et al. qtd. in Campana et al. 369). However, in the current digital age, libraries must adapt pre-existing programs “to engage youth and families” as they “look for opportunities, embrace flexibility, and be fearless and open-minded about inevitable change” (Maddigan and Bloos x). In order to engage the community with literacy, library programs should make every effort to continue meeting communities where they are at.

Likewise, in after-school literacy programs, the effectiveness of developing literacy skills depends on both the implementation and engagement of the program. While “thoughtful preparation, suitable resources, and ongoing attention” are all important for after-school programs, “youth engagement, attendance, and performance” are more essential for literacy success, illustrating the relationship between the programming itself and the response of participants (Foley and Eddins qtd. in Kirkland and Hull 718). The programs “KidzLit” and “100 Books Challenge” are two of many after-school programs that provide students the opportunity to grow in their literacy proficiency. By offering a space outside of the classroom, these programs are “fueled by alternative theories of literacy learning that see pleasure, play, and relevance as essential to the developmental experience” (Kirkland and Hull 718). Since achievement-based programs currently dominate the curriculum and structure of many afterschool literacy programs, approaching literacy creatively provides an alternative way for children to grow in their love for literature. According to Kirkland and Hull, literature concerning afterschool programs suggests that “schools alone are widely viewed as insufficient for promoting the literacy activities needed to develop citizens in the 21st century” (718). This affirms the need for after-school programs to approach literacy in ways schools cannot.

Lastly, in university-public library partnerships, “public libraries can maximize their potential to support early learning and development through partnership with developmental

researchers” (Taylor et al. 66). Through some university-based partnerships, a context for community-based research is established (Taylor et al. 59). In others, a context for literacy growth is created. For example, Brown University Library hosted free summer educational programs in 2024, designed to engage local families in reading and STEM, among other topics (“Library’s New Initiatives”). However, no matter what type of program, “competent, caring, and committed literacy teachers” are always valued in these partnerships, as they navigate different approaches to literacy based on their audience (Malcolmson 17, 30). To engage community literacy effectively, literacy teachers should be equipped to guide readers and writers of any age in purposeful literacy practices.

In order to engage with pre-existing conversations regarding community literacy, my research presents the ABL’s Children’s Summer Institute as a case study that exemplifies community literacy in the context of a children’s literacy enrichment program. Many academic conversations surrounding children’s literacy focus on literacy program instruction, literacy achievement, and literacy programming itself. While achievement-based literacy programs are beneficial for student success, there is also value in studying enrichment-based literacy programs, as both are designed to supplement school-based curriculum. For that reason, my research engages with previous conversations on literacy while highlighting an example of what a participatory and engaging children’s enrichment literacy program can look like.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Children’s Summer Institute was a children’s literacy enrichment program that existed from 1989 to 1993, administered by Baylor University’s Armstrong Browning Library in Waco, Texas. It grew out of the library’s annual “Pied Piper” tours, which were given to fifth graders in the local area (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). In the program’s first brochure, it was described as “an Enrichment Program filled with participatory activities exposing children to the best of children’s literature” (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). The program’s final summer was in 1993, and although the exact reason for the program’s conclusion is not documented, those associated with the program speculate it was due to time constraints, financial reasons, trouble recruiting a full class of students, or competition with other programs in the area (Burgess, Personal Interview). The CSI was one of many summer programs in the Waco area during that time.

METHODOLOGY

I collected my data utilizing qualitative and textual methodologies to develop a complete understanding of the CSI: what it was, how it operated, and how it impacted those involved. The majority of my research was spent in the archives at Baylor University’s Armstrong Browning Library, analyzing all archival information related to the Institute, including annual records, mailing lists and publicity, bibliographies, brochures of other programs, and teachers’ papers by conducting a close reading of them. During this content analysis, I determined which documents were relevant to my

research, relevant to broader conversations surrounding children's literacy, and relevant to the Institute itself while identifying common patterns and themes. I also utilized a comparative analysis to determine how the program changed over time.

To supplement my archival research, I conducted a few outside interviews to hear from those who were directly involved with the program. During the interview process, I reached out to 19 former participants of the CSI, three of whom were willing to interview. All participants were given the options of conducting a Zoom, phone call, email, or in-person interview and given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. One participant, Tyrone Williams, opted for the Zoom interview, while the other two participants, Emily Lewis and James Anderson, opted for the email interview. In addition, I interviewed Cynthia Burgess, who was the senior library assistant at the time of the program, and Professor Jill Brown, a pseudonym, who has expertise in elementary literacy education. Both women opted for in-person interviews. All interviews were completed with IRB approval and consent and audio recorded. A complete list of questions can be found in the Appendix. Combining the archival analysis and qualitative interview methods both confirmed the information in the archival materials and testified to the program's real-life impact for those involved, bringing the textual documents to life.

FINDINGS

Through my research findings, I discovered that the Children's Summer Institute is an ex-

ample of an accessible, interactive, and engaging literacy enrichment program due to its intentional programming, which can be applied to literacy practices today. As mentioned previously, the Institute was put on by Armstrong Browning Library, a special collections library focusing on nineteenth-century literature and culture in Waco, Texas. The CSI was the outgrowth of the library's "Pied Piper" tours for area fifth graders, which were an important enterprise for the library at the time, though they are no longer offered today (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). These tours introduced students to the beauty of the library and the work of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, namely the poem *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (Burgess, Personal Interview). After seeing children take interest in literature during the tours, the program was created.

In 1988, Dr. Roger L. Brooks, the director of Armstrong Browning Library at the time, wrote a letter to Dr. Jonathan A. Lindsey, the coordinator of library affairs, requesting approval for a program for fifth graders, specifically, "an enrichment one in children's literature," similar to other programs that existed at the time (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). His request was granted. From its inception, the CSI sought to be an accessible program for all children to attend. The initiative began with Dr. Lindsey's recommendation to provide scholarships for students who could not afford to pay the \$40 tuition (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). In a letter to Dr. Brooks, Dr. Lindsey wrote, "Baylor University should have no public program which restricts access" (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). His recommendation

was implemented, as four scholarships were made possible in the second year by holding back \$160 worth of income from the first year (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). Moving forward, scholarships were available every summer (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 4). Another prominent program during the time was the Baylor University-sponsored University for Young People. This program was described as one for gifted students and was highly selective based on test scores, IQ, and teacher recommendations (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 30). With the University for Young People, a child's academic merit was a deciding factor in whether they could participate, but for the Children's Summer Institute, all students were invited to attend, regardless of their academic background.

To further promote accessibility of the program, the library's methods for recruiting students were inclusive of every school within Waco Independent School District and beyond. To recruit the first class of students, Mrs. Cynthia Burgess, the senior library assistant for the entirety of the program, reached out to 44 fifth-grade teachers across 15 different schools in the Waco area, providing them with pamphlets for each individual student and inviting them to encourage their students to participate in the program (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 1, 2). In the following years, she broadened her reach by contacting school principals and administrators to ask for help in distributing the program brochures (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 4). In 1991, she wrote to newspaper editors in the area, requesting a short article about the CSI to be written to spread word about the

program (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 22). In 1993, she reached out to radio broadcasters, asking if they might mention the program on air during the "community calendar" broadcasts (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 21). These efforts were made to recruit as widely as possible, as the classes never reached full capacity after the first summer.

In the first class of the CSI, there were 24 students from 13 different schools, with some students from out of town (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). In 1990, the second class of the CSI included 25 students from at least 15 different schools, including Waco area schools, Hillsboro, Dallas, and Richardson, Texas (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 2, 5, 6). In the following years, the number of students who participated in the programs decreased, but the number of schools represented remained high (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 8, 13, 19). Even when the CSI did not bring in much profit, the library continued the program due to their dedication to literature (Burgess, Personal Interview). "It certainly didn't bring anything to the library, other than knowing we were encouraging young people to read more and appreciate literature," Burgess said (Personal Interview). The program evolved over time, implementing a variety of pedagogical tools to expose students to the best of children's literature and encouraging them to tap into their creative and imaginative capabilities when writing stories of their own.

As its brochure highlights, the Children's Summer Institute was a day camp with week-long sessions, Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to noon and typically held in July (CSI

Records, Box 1, Folder 1). It offered one or two sessions per summer and was originally designed for students who had completed fifth grade but later expanded to include fourth through seventh grade students (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 19). Despite how short the program was, the schedule was thoughtfully pre-planned by the teaching staff. For the first two years, the teacher of the program was Ms. Sue Christian Hall. She held a Bachelor of Science in Education and a Master of Science in Education from Baylor University (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). In addition, she was a fourth-grade teacher in the Waco area and one of five recipients to receive the Waco Outstanding Teacher Award (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). For the next three years, the teacher was Mrs. Sandra Wormley. Mrs. Wormley held a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Sam Houston State University and was both a content mastery teacher and a Campus Outstanding Teacher in Waco (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 8). As mentioned previously, Mrs. Cynthia Burgess was the senior library assistant throughout the entirety of the program, primarily contributing through administrative work. She held a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of North Texas and was a certified school librarian (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 8). Although the program was held in a classroom and led by an official teacher, the Institute was not designed to feel like school (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 2). Through the leadership of these women, the program's schedule of activities was intentionally designed to engage students while incorporating effective literacy practices.

When looking at its programmatic features, the CSI's first brochure said the program hoped to expand an interest in "literature and writing by exposing the students to great children's literature, both classic and contemporary, in fun and exciting ways" and to "create a new enjoyment and appreciation of the written word" (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). During the first summer of the CSI, the programming included an extended "Pied Piper" tour, guest storytellers, partner work on brainstorming story ideas, a puppeteer demonstration, the opportunity to learn about different books via audio and video recordings, and the chance to paint murals of storybook worlds (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 2). On the last day of each session, the library held a "Grande Finale." In 1989, students arrived dressed as their favorite book characters and painted murals depicting the stories their characters came from before using the murals as backdrops to tell new fantasy adventures (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 2). Parents and guardians were invited to these "Grande Finales" to recognize the hard work and creativity their children put in during the week (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 8). Instead of having children read passively or do things individually, the program focused on intentional engagement with the text and with each other by discussing readings, acting out plays, and creating stories of their own, exemplifying community literacy in action.

During the first few summers, programming started with the enrichment of students' enjoyment of literature, but it evolved into enrichment through creative composition as well. From 1991 to 1993, children had the

opportunity to write, edit, and “publish” a book together, encouraging creativity, imagination, and ownership of one’s work (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 9). This book is still kept in the archive today. As they wrote the book together, they crafted poems describing themselves, reimagined proverbs to create their own stories, illustrated their work, and created original recipes for friendship, happy homes, and successful lives (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 9). The students also practiced creating and acting out skits, which they often performed at their “Grande Finales.” In a 1991 post-program survey, nine out of eleven participants said that the plays and skits were their favorite part of the program (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 19). In this way, these activities encouraged creative composition, imaginative expression, and original storytelling.

Besides creative composition and play performances, there were also interactive storytelling sessions, field trips, and opportunities to hear from a variety of local guest speakers, such as Tayna Browne of Channel 25 News and Freda Gilbert of the Central Texas Zoological Park, which is now known as the Cameron Park Zoo (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 4, 13). While Tayna interviewed students for the news, Freda brought live animals to the library for the children to meet, which was connected to their study of Rudyard Kipling’s story, “The Elephant’s Child” (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 4, 13). The students also heard from Baylor professor Dr. Tom Hanks and puppeteer Mr. Bruce Johnson. Dr. Hanks did a dramatic reading of A.A. Milne’s *The House at Pooh Corner*, making the characters come to

life with their own distinct personalities and voices, while Mr. Johnson brought the fantasy world of his puppet characters alive for the class (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 1, 2). Regardless of who the speakers were, these adults shared their passion with the students, modeling an interest and excitement for literacy.

In a similar vein, the Children’s Summer Institute demonstrates how a love and appreciation for literacy can be established early on by exposing children to what they considered to be the best children’s literature of the time. During the first session alone, participants were exposed to books including *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Just So Stories*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 2). By the end of the week, the program staff hoped the children would develop a new enjoyment and appreciation of books and would leave eager to read and write more on their own (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). “The main thing is to get them reading,” Ms. Hall was quoted as having said in an article published by the *Waco Tribune-Herald* in 1989. “We wanted to introduce them to good literature and get them excited about it. We’re sending them home with an extended bibliography, so hopefully they’ll run to the library” (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 2). The way in which these bibliographies were composed is not documented, although Burgess said she thinks they were either created or influenced in part by Dr. Pat Sharp, a now-retired professor from Baylor’s School of Education (Personal Interview). Inside the front cover of the bibliography, it would always

say, “Although this list is long, it is only a small sample of the many wonderful books just waiting for you at your public and school libraries — read and enjoy” (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 8). Although the program only had five days to impact students, the bibliography was intentionally designed to continue literacy beyond the walls of Armstrong Browning Library.

One participant deeply impacted by the program was Emily Lewis, who took part in the first summer session of the CSI, “A Week of Fantasy.” Lewis said she remembers the feeling of absolute awe when she walked into the library, thinking it was both beautiful and majestic. She, like many other children her age, was impressed by the grandeur of the library, having never seen anything like it before. She remembers the fun and enjoyment of getting to both write and illustrate a story during her time at the Institute. Before she ever attended the program, she said she had long been surrounded by literacy. “I read a lot! I read [more] books in first grade than any other student in my whole grade,” Lewis said. “My mother and grandmother were directors of libraries, so I was around books my whole life” (Personal Interview). She said she understands the importance of having gained such literacy skills early on and recognizes that not all children have the same experience. “Not everyone will have the same access to parents or family that encourage them to be educated or even to read and write,” Lewis said. “Literacy programs may be the only introduction to reading and writing, and hopefully, it will spark a child’s imagination” (Personal Interview). Now, as a

lawyer, she continues to read and write regularly for her job.

Tyrone Williams, a participant of the fourth summer session of the CSI, “Reading Fest,” said although he does not remember much about his experience, he remembers acting out skits, reading *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, walking on campus, and eating the “big, giant cookies” (Personal Interview). Now, he is a quality engineering technician for Tesla by day and a traveling musician by night and said he credits the program for furthering his appreciation of the arts. “It facilitated everything for what I’m doing now,” Williams said (Personal Interview). Before he ever attended the program, Williams described himself as a “reading junkie,” since both of his parents pushed him toward literacy (Personal Interview). Today, he still loves to write and read, especially when it comes to making music. “There are people that love my songs to this day,” Williams said. “It doesn’t feel like I’m writing songs. It feels like subconsciously writing a dream on paper” (Personal Interview). Even now, Williams regularly engages with writing and reading.

Based on interviews with former participants and quotes from students in the archival materials, the Children’s Summer Institute received positive feedback about its engaging and participatory design. In a *Waco Tribune-Herald* article written after the first summer program, one student said her favorite part of the program was writing a fantasy story, while another student said, “I like [*The Hobbit*]. It sounded interesting and has a lot of people in it, a whole bunch of imaginary characters” (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 2). Similarly, one parent

of a student who participated wrote a thank-you card to the library after the first summer, emphasizing her son's great enjoyment of the program. "He enjoyed the session so much; we were so pleased with his enthusiasm," the mother wrote. "On Friday, he expressed the wish that the program were not over" (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). One poem written by three students during the third summer of the program captures the program's essence from their point of view:

The summer institute was really fun. It
kept us out of the blazing sun.

We read, we wrote, and acted in plays.
Too bad it only lasted five days.

For the plays, we made Homie, a raven,
a rooster, and a crow.

Now we found out a lot of things we
didn't know. (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 9)

Although the testimonies of a few students are not representative of every child who attended the program, they demonstrate the program's impact due to its interactive and captivating approach that furthered a love for literature.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As an extension of community literacy, the Armstrong Browning Library's Children's Summer Institute is an example of a children's literacy enrichment program that can provide guidance for contemporary efforts, as its methods fostered a love for literacy due to its engaging, participatory, and accessible program-

ming. The programming was designed to maximize a child's engagement with literacy and with other participants, focusing on collective growth rather than the individualistic growth that might be found in a school setting. In doing so, the program modeled how literacy programs should operate within the framework of community literacy. The best example of community literacy is the original books the students wrote and illustrated together during some of the sessions, which allowed them to write creatively alongside one another and enjoy the process of writing.

The books were often comprised of two types of stories — individual stories and joint stories that celebrated each child's unique imaginative expression. During "A Splash of Writing" in 1992, students each wrote bio poems, which included their hobbies, talents, likes, dislikes, and goals, to name a few categories (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 15). While some children wrote of becoming pediatric cardiologists or plastic surgeons, another child wanted to become a journalist and "change lives through writing" (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 15). Likewise, the students' joint stories were often adaptations of nursery rhymes or author and illustrator collaborations, encouraging fantasy and imaginative exploration. In one instance, three students rewrote *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* from the rat's point of view, allowing them to interact with the original story by writing a response to it (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 13). Emily Lewis mentioned enjoying writing and illustrating her own story during her interview, which testifies to the lasting impact of the activity (Personal Interview).

Between the qualified teaching staff, intentional programming, and library environment, the program as a whole facilitated community literacy well to the benefit of its participants.

Furthermore, the program's accessibility efforts highlighted how literacy should be available regardless of socioeconomic or academic status. Sometimes, teachers have the potential to better understand a student's reading and writing abilities than a parent or guardian would at home (Gerde et al. 356). Recognizing this, Burgess specifically encouraged teachers to recommend the program to students who might be interested (CSI Records, Box 1, Folder 1). Although literacy looks different based on circumstances, Professor Brown noted that "every student, no matter their background or where they come from, deserves to learn to read" (Personal Interview). However, not all children will have easy access to literacy. While the CSI was as accessible as it could be during its time, children's literacy programs today should seek to match the accessibility of the CSI or go beyond it by tapping into digital resources. To that end, social media provides a platform for messages to be spread quickly and efficiently, which literacy programs could use to their advantage to further accessibility.

In addition, the Children's Summer Institute teaches us that a love for literacy should be modeled by parents and guardians. For the CSI, Burgess extensively advocated for the program by writing letters to teachers, administrators, newspaper editors, and broadcasters to expand the reach of the program and increase registration. Ultimately, it was parents or guardians who signed up their children for

the program. Adults can help children build a healthy relationship with literacy by modeling their own genuine passion for it. Professor Brown agrees with this sentiment in that parents and guardians should play an active role in the literacy of their children: "If the adults in a child's life show that literacy is important, then it's going to be important to the child" (Personal Interview). The testimonies of Emily Lewis and Tyrone Williams demonstrate that while the program increased their love for literacy, it was their parents who initially pushed them toward reading and writing before they ever walked into Armstrong Browning Library.

The CSI recognized the important role of parents and guardians in their child's relationship with literacy by inviting them to the "Grande Finale" at the end of each session and providing students with a take-home bibliography to continue their love for literacy at home. When reviewing these bibliographies, I found them to be both comprehensive and thoughtfully compiled. They consistently included a wide variety of genres, each accompanied by numerous titles to choose from (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 26, 27). The bibliographies showed that engaging with literacy did not end when participants left the library. Instead, the bibliographies cultivate a love for reading at home and encourage parent or guardian involvement to accompany their children to the library. The CSI also modeled adult advocacy for children's literacy by bringing in guest speakers to Armstrong Browning Library. Whether it be hearing Dr. Tom Hanks' dramatic reading of A.A. Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner* or watching Mr. Bruce Johnson

demonstrate creativity with his puppets and marionettes, this programming technique put the passion of adults who deeply cared about literacy and storytelling upon full display for the children to see (CSI Records, Box 1, Folders 1, 2). By watching an adult show enthusiasm for literacy, children are more likely to imitate it themselves.

However, not all parents and guardians have the time or energy to further their child's literacy in a home environment. Some parents and guardians may not play an active role in the home, while other parents and guardians may not feel comfortable themselves engaging in literacy and therefore cannot model literacy for their children. Under these circumstances, schools, libraries, and literacy programs should aid in supporting parents and guardians by providing free resources. While identifying which specific literacy resources would be most beneficial to families falls outside the scope of my research, it is important to reflect on, especially in light of today's digital culture that impacts literacy learning.

Understanding how digital culture shapes literacy practices can help guide decisions about which resources might best support families today. As a teacher in the school system, former CSI participant James Anderson has seen the impact of technology firsthand, having taught for over ten years. "Screen time has replaced the desire to explore. Many students do not have the ability to look beyond the walls that surround them or the screen in front of them. They do not know how to think for themselves," Anderson said. "Literacy today seems to be telling students what to read and

then what to think about the reading instead of instilling a curiosity and teaching them how to analyze and discern information" (Personal Interview). Unfortunately, this approach limits students' critical thinking skills and their ability to engage with texts on their own.

When analyzing the CSI programming, the opposite is found. The students were encouraged to think for themselves, embrace creativity and curiosity, and offered a wide range of authors and genres to read after the program ended. Professor Brown echoed the impact of digital culture on literacy, implying that due to the rise of technology, students have stopped reading books to find the answers to their questions. "I can't express how important [reading to children] is, especially in our world of technology," Brown said. "Children need to hold books and see books and feel them and learn how to turn their pages and know the adventures that books bring" (Personal Interview). In contrast, Donald J. Leu, Jr., as a teacher, takes another approach. He argues that teachers need to adapt their literacy practices to meet technological advances, as "the rapid infusion of the Internet in the classroom calls for a fundamental change in our focus. If we are fortunate enough to prepare teachers for literacy instruction, we need to include the Internet in their preparation" (Leu 424). Considering his argument, Leu could be right. The overwhelming presence of technology and the Internet could mean changing the approach to literacy practices. As forms of literacy evolve, community literacy programs have the opportunity to engage students in ways that school environments cannot.

CONCLUSION

The Armstrong Browning Library's Children's Summer Institute may represent only one children's literacy enrichment program, but it exemplifies how intentional, engaging, and interactive programming can effectively further literacy within a community literacy framework. To this end, the archival material relating to the Children's Summer Institute reveals a program that fostered a love and appreciation for literature, with all documentation from participants reporting a positive experience with the program. These results emphasize the importance of enrichment-based literacy programs for children, as they can complement traditional school curriculum. While achievement-based programs can certainly strengthen literacy skills, the CSI focused on the foundation of creating enjoyment and appreciation for literacy through its enrichment approach.

The Institute can provide guidance for contemporary efforts by emphasizing that literacy should be accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic or academic status, and by encouraging parents and guardians to model a love for literacy. Not all parents or guardians have

the capacity to model a love for literacy in a home environment, meaning schools, libraries, and literacy programs should provide resources to make literacy more accessible. Children's literacy has the potential to flourish if people continue to passionately advocate for it, model a genuine love for reading and writing, and engage with literature in meaningful ways. Further research could be conducted to learn how literacy programs can support literacy in the home, to discover what specific methods of pedagogy are best for teaching children's literacy, and to learn how to engage literacy in a way that complements modern technology. To gain a complete understanding of children's literacy programming, programs over the past three decades could be analyzed for their pedagogical approaches and engagement strategies.

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APPENDIX A

Questions for Former Children's Summer Institute Participants

- Tell me a little about yourself and what you do now.
- What do you remember from your experiences with the Children's Summer Institute?
- Although it was a long time ago, do you remember any takeaways that you had?
- What did literacy look like throughout your childhood, either before or after this program?
- Were there any other significant events or people who influenced your literacy throughout your youth and adolescence?
- What do your literacy practices look like today?
- Do you believe children's literacy programs like the Children's Summer Institute should exist today? If so, why? What elements should be included?

Questions for Former Children's Summer Institute Facilitator

- Tell me about your background with literature and what you do now.
What motivates you to continue working for Armstrong Browning Library?
- What do you remember from your experiences with the Children's Summer Institute?
Are there significant memories that stand out?
- In what ways do you believe children's literacy programs are important?
- Why did the program end?
- What were the Pied Piper Tours?
- What was the conversation surrounding children's literacy like at the time of the program?
- What did you learn about children's literacy from the facilitation of the program?
What made Armstrong Browning's program different from others in the area?
- Do you think there's a need for children's literacy programs now?

Questions for Children's Literacy Professor

- In your teaching of elementary literacy education, what have you learned about children?
What are some best practices when it comes to teaching them?
What is the best way to approach the pedagogy of children's literature?
- I read that you have been a reading specialist in the past. Through that role, what did you learn about children's literacy?

- I read that you believe that “all children have the right to become proficient readers.” Could you tell me more about this?
- What impact do you think children’s literature has on young, malleable minds?
Do you think reading at an early age is important with the increasing amount of technology?
- Do you believe that children’s literacy programs are important for children? If so, why?
- If you were to create a children’s literacy program today, what elements would you include?

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