

Teaching During Challenging Times:

An Evaluation of the Literacy Fellows Volunteer Program

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Thank you!

- Teachers, staff, administrators, children, and parents at the two Baltimore City participating schools
- Amber Brock, Julia Crabb, Emily Dickenson, Rebecca Dowling, Melanie James, Hilary Grace Lahoury, Megan Rowan
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Overview

- Theoretical Background
- General Description of Evaluation
- Guiding Questions for this Talk
- Findings
- Conclusion



Background

- In 2018, 81% of elementary students in BCPS did not meet expectations on the Language Arts PARCC compared with 50% for the rest of the state (Maryland Report Card, 2019)
- **Need for Effective Interventions: School Community Partnership**
 - School-university partnership between Sherman Center at UMBC and BCPS schools → Literacy Fellows Program (LFP)
 - LFP is a service-learning project designed to improve literacy outcomes for 1st & 2nd grade students at 2 Baltimore City schools whose student populations are primarily low-income, and Black or Brown.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model

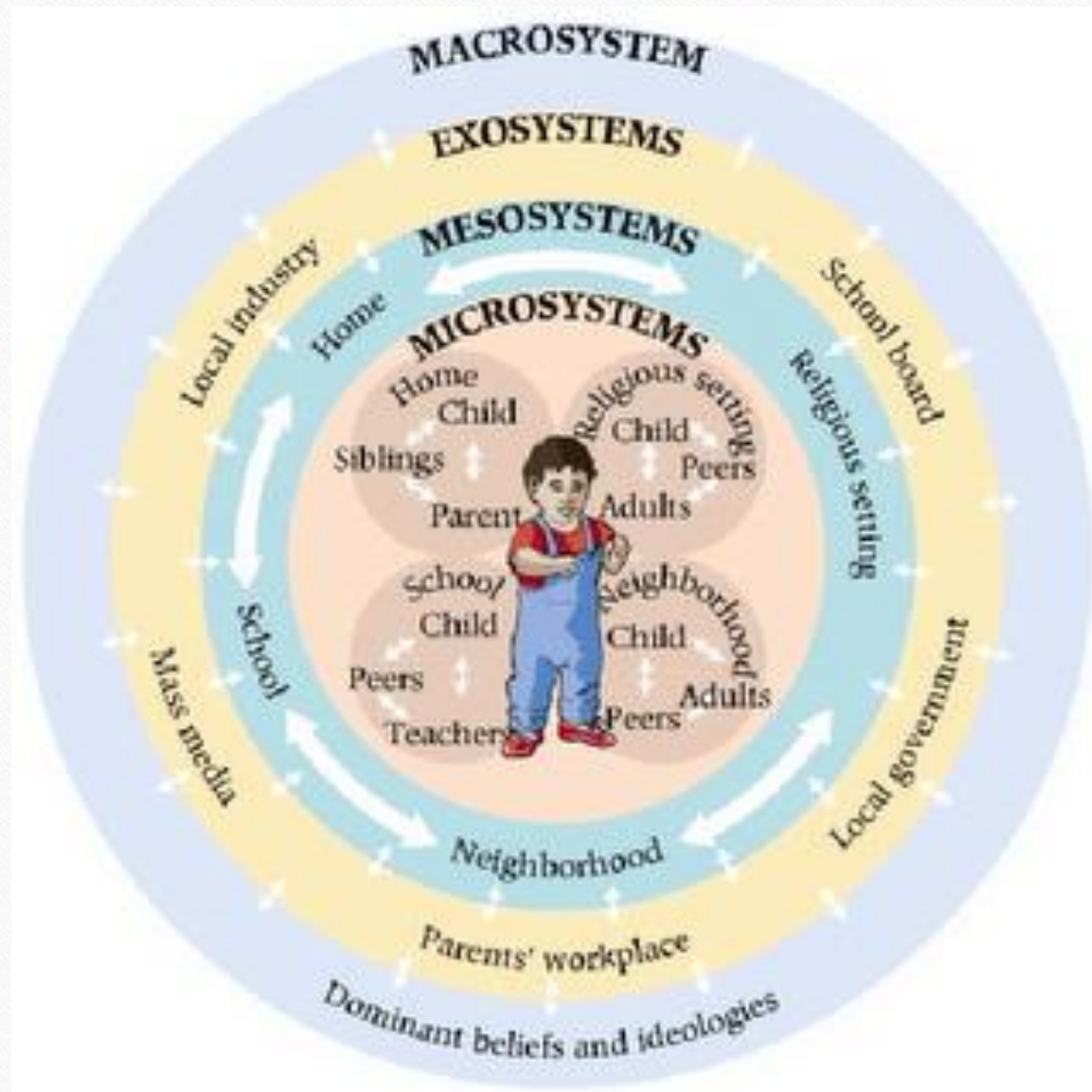


Table 1.
Student Characteristics and Outcomes, School Year 2018–2019 (in percentages unless otherwise specified)

	School One	School Two
Size (number of students)	317	222
Racial/ethnic composition		
African American	44	68
Latinx	19	26
White	32	5
Other	5	1
English learners (ELs)	15	17
Students eligible for free and reduced-price meal (FARM)	61	67
Student Outcomes		
Proficient in Mathematics	4.5	4.1
Proficient in English Language Arts	5	6.6
Chronologically absent	55	46

Notes. Information comes from the AY 2018-2019 Maryland Public Schools Report Card. AY 2018-2019 is the latest year for which data are available. At the time of the study, both schools were combined. Report data came from the elementary grades. Chronologically absent students are considered those who missed school for 10% or more school days.

General Description of Evaluation

5 Waves of Data Collection: 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022

- Fall 2019: Interviewed children (N=140) and parents (N=84)
- Spring 2022: Interviewed children (N=46)
- Observed in each classroom at least once
- Interviewed teachers (N=14) 1 to 2 times a year
 - Most were experienced teachers: teaching at least 3 years

General Description of Evaluation

- Interviewed volunteers (N=26) 1 to 2 times a year
 - Mean age 19.23 years
 - Been LFV on average 1-2 semesters
 - Diverse racial/ethnic background
 - 6 wanted to become teachers; however, few had taken educational courses.

General Description of Evaluation

➤ Why they joined LFP:

- Program Requirement
- Thought it would be interesting experience
- Learn more about underserved populations
- Make a difference in lives of low-income children

Guiding Questions for This Talk

- How did teachers utilize the assistance of the LFVs in their classroom?
- What was the most useful contribution of the LFVs?
- What were the most challenging tasks for teachers and LFV52s?
- Did responses to any of these issues change during COVID-19?



Sample Teacher Interview Questions

- What do you think about the Literacy Fellows program? What are the things that work the best about the program? And what are the things that work the least about the program?
- What benefits, if any, does the Literacy Fellows program bring to your work as a teacher in the classroom?
- What benefits, if any, does the Literacy Fellows program bring to your students? What do you think about the Literacy Fellow/Volunteer who have been assigned to your classroom? [Probe: things that like the best and the least about having her/him in the classroom?]
- How do you use the Literacy Fellows?

Sample Teacher Interview Questions

- How would you describe the collaboration with her/him? Could you describe how do you work together to implement the Literacy Fellows program?
- Did you provide any training to the Literacy Fellows working in your classroom? If so, what?
- How are you adjusting to teaching online? What are the things that work the best about the online teaching? What are the things that work the least about online teaching?
- How is the Literacy Fellows program supporting your teaching in the classroom this semester? What benefits, if any, does the Literacy Fellows program bring to your work as a teacher this year?

How Did Teachers Utilize the Assistance of the LFBVs in Their Classrooms?

	Number of times teacher mentioned activity		
	Pre-COVID (In-person)	Mid-COVID (Virtual)	Post-COVID (In-Person)
Small Group	34	26	36
High Functioning Group	2	6	2
Low Functioning Group	15	2	12
Focus on Phonics	11	3	13
Behavioral Support	9	1	4
Extra Support	46	20	30

How Were Volunteers Trained?

	Number of times teacher mentioned type of training		
	Pre-COVID (In-person)	Mid-COVID (Virtual)	Post-COVID (In-Person)
Told what to do morning of	19	2	9
Emailed / talked ahead of time	7	14	2
Unsure how to train volunteers	4	1	0
Unsure of volunteer's background	3	2	0
Wish they had more time to train	9	3	4
Did not train	9	6	0

What Was the Most Useful Contribution of the Literacy Fellow Volunteers?

➤ Allows for group equity

- “I have twenty-eight students this year and you know, it becomes an equity issue when we just don’t have the time to help every group, so I really try to focus this year... I try to pull the lows as much as I can, but I have her now pull different levels so that every group gets some of that one-on-one.”
- “You know I can’t get to all children, all the children all the time so, she’s able to pull a couple groups when I’m unable to ...So, just for me it’s just given me an extra set of hands.”

What Was the Most Useful Contribution of the Literacy Fellow Volunteers?

➤ Allows time or more time for “lower” group / Allows more time for “higher” group

- “I usually provide her with the lower children because I know that the things are a little bit more simple in terms of... what they need and I know that she’s able to do it without a lot of ... coaching.”

➤ Made learning fun for the students

- “I told her I said ... when I did progress monitoring, they’re still struggling with the corresponding sounds, so she, you know, she has jumped right in, she has made it fun, they’re, you know, you see them, they’re into it, they want to stay.”

What Was the Most Useful Contribution of the Literacy Fellow Volunteers?

➤ Can do what teachers cannot

- “Which I was struggling with this entire year, like the entire... half of the year, and she just came in and added something that I wasn't able to add and I was grateful for her.”
- “But I have one student that really just never wants to do work, never wants to write, but when my Fellow is here, he will sit down and do the work with her. So, just helping those students that need that extra push or like one-on-one instruction.”

➤ Extra set of eyes

- “Oh, the extra support, the extra eyes in the room.”

The Most Challenging Things for Teachers and Literacy Fellow Volunteers

Teachers:

- Not enough time in classroom
- Not knowing background of Literacy Fellows

Literacy Fellow Volunteers:

- Difficulty with scheduling, transportation



Changes during COVID-19

➤ Zoom-based Instruction

- Keeping students engaged
- Harder to do small group work or know what students needed

➤ More Training

- Emailed night before what LFV should do



Conclusions

- Evaluation focused on teachers' and LFV's thoughts about the intervention processes
 - Future research / evaluations should consider direct assessments of children's literacy skills



Conclusions

- Successful intervention despite the limited training / educational background of LFVs
 - Did what teacher requested, and seemed to do it well
 - Related well with the children and teachers
 - Good role models
 - In addition to providing needed extra set of hands, learned about the educational process

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