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LITERACY ACCESS THROUGH STORYTIME: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY STORYTELLERS IN A LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD

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While early literacy achievement continues to be stratified by social class in the United States, public libraries often offer programs such as "storytime" in order to bolster the literacy development of youth in their communities. The purpose of the present ethnographic study was to explore how storytellers recruited and maintained participation in this free literacy program in a lower-income neighborhood. Via participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and artifact collection, storytellers recruited new patrons to storytime by (1) appealing to community members to enter the physical space of the library and (2) appealing to library patrons to attend storytime. Once patrons attended storytime, storytellers acted in order to maintain storytime attendance by (1) facilitating meaningful learning experiences, (2) fostering enjoyment through participation, (3) developing nurturing relationships, and (4) offering flexibility in storytime expectations. By exploring a contextualized account of the work of storytellers, the findings suggest important avenues through which public programs may contribute to more equitable access to literacy learning.

The historical context of inequity in education is as well-documented as the literacy achievement data that continues to evince it (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Unfortunately, systemic inequity has been bound tightly within the process of formal schooling and its unraveling continues to bestow opportunities upon some individuals while denying opportunities to others. The legacy is a current educational reality in which children living in poverty have lower literacy achievement than do their middle-income peers (Ayoub et al., 2009; Evans & Rosenbaum, 2008; Kahlenberg, 2003; Kainz & Vernon-Feagans, 2007; Lee & Al Otaiba, 2015; Neuman & Celano, 2012). Modifying the proverbial phrase slightly, the literacy rich get richer and the literacy poor get poorer.

Hart and Risley's (2003) seminal study documents how inequities of children's language exposure and experience, based on social class, begin at birth and only increase over

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time. The resulting disparities in vocabulary serve as an indicator of subsequent reading difficulties (Tong, Deacon, Kirby, Cain, & Parrila, 2011). Previous research also shows the benefits of providing children with early language and literacy experiences (Barone, 2011; Vera, 2011). Connecting schools, families, and the community can allow all three constituencies to learn and grow together in order to combat these disparities. Community supports for children's language and literacy development are often available before formal schooling begins and continue throughout a child's education. Public libraries are among those community agencies having the potential to partner with families and schools in support of early literacy development and achievement.

Public libraries offer a host of literacy experiences for families. Such experiences include a program called storytime, which most often serves children from birth to age five but can also serve older children as well (Martinez, 2007; Reta & Brady, 2007). According to McNeil (2014):

> Storytime should be an effective presentation of early literacy skills and activities, it should be entertaining and heart-warming, and it should promote interaction between adult and child. It should also be an opportunity for the audience to be exposed to quality literature that builds vocabulary, creativity, awareness of self and others, and knowledge. (p.13)

Storytime is often referred to by a variety of other names including, but not limited to, *Mainly Mother Goose* (Graham & Gagnon, 2013), *Mother Goose on the Loose* (Bayliss, 2014), and *Story Hours* (Albright, Delecki, & Hinkle, 2009).

Although Dowd (1997) wrote a call for research regarding the impact of storytime programs on early literacy development two decades ago, research pertaining to storytime remains relatively sparse with the exception of a few consequential studies (e.g., Campana et al., 2016; Celano & Neuman, 2001; Graham & Gagnon, 2013; McKenzie & Stooke, 2007). The bulk of published literature relating to storytime remains anecdotal, autobiographic, monographic, and journalistic in nature. We found no published empirical studies that explored how to expand storytime attendance. Given the current context of budget cuts, resulting in decreased programming and closures of libraries (Becker, 2012) particularly in low-income areas (Neuman & Celano, 2012), we presently examined the ways in which storytellers in one public library in a low-income neighborhood actively attempt to increase participation in storytime through the use of ethnographic methods. In addition, we provide a comparative lens through which librarians potentially can analyze current strategies for increasing participation in library programs.

Storytime Over Time

Storytimes at public libraries have a long and rich history and are now nearly ubiquitous in libraries across America (Campana et al., 2016). According to Albright et al. (2009), storytimes began in the 1940s and early 1950s in response to emerging theories of reading readiness which suggested that children needed exposure to certain aspects of reading before reading themselves. During this time, librarians sought to provide children with multiple literacy experiences, often without the presence of a caregiver or parent (Colburn, 2013; Graham & Gagnon, 2013). Librarians expected children to sit quietly and listen (Celano & Neuman, 2015). This traditional format of storytime was presumed to increase children's independence and decrease parental disruptions (Reid, 2009). Over time, the role of parents and caregivers during storytime changed dramatically along with society's understanding of early literacy development. Many public libraries have adjusted storytime programming in order to include playing, singing, and games, thereby making libraries much noisier, engaging, and parent-friendly places (Celano & Neuman, 2015).

In 2004, the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children collaborated in order to create the research-based *Every Child Ready to Read*® initiative (ECRR), which seeks to increase the impact of libraries regarding early literacy by educating parents. The ECRR website states: "If the primary adults in a child's life can learn more about the importance of early literacy and how to nurture pre-reading skills at home, the effect of the library efforts can be multiplied many times more" (American Library Association, 2015, p. 2). The revised version of ECRR

(2011) is focused on five broad practices, including singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing. During storytime, storytellers model these practices and offer families suggestions regarding how to adopt such practices in their homes (Celano & Neuman, 2015). Thus, the use of the ECRR philosophy and toolkit has significantly shaped storytime programming in the last decade (American Library Association, 2015).

As storytime has changed over time, so has the population it serves. Hughes-Hassell, Agosto, and Sun (2007) suggested that additional storytimes in the evenings and weekends are needed in order to meet the demands of working families. For example, a majority of the children attending storytimes offered between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. did so with a daycare provider, grandparents, or a caregiver other than parents, which Neuman and Celano (2012) suggest can result in fewer adult/child literacy interactions. Hughes-Hassel et al. (2007) proposed innovative ways to increase storytime availability including training volunteers to lead storytimes, creating storytime kits for families to checkout, and offering storytime via internet or phone services.

In addition, some authors have explored how lessons can be delivered in locations outside of libraries in order to make attendance more convenient (e.g., McCune, 2010). One example is a collaborative project with the Twinsburg Public Library (in Ohio) in which storytime sessions were offered near a housing project in order to increase participation of those individuals living nearby (Johnson, 2015). In another example, librarians in North Carolina invited teachers and caregivers to training sessions regarding how to use "Storytime to Go" kits that were created by staff and available for checkout to those individuals trained (Pflug, 2004). While Neuman and Celano (2006) found that equalizing resources for libraries in low-income neighborhoods may not necessarily result in equitable use of such resources, innovative outreach programs such as those programs described above may provide qualitatively different approaches to storytime that result in increased benefits for children in low-income neighborhoods.

The Impact of Storytime

Some researchers have focused primarily on the effects of storytime on adult behavior. For example, Graham and Gagnon (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Canada in order to determine the effects of *Mainly Mother Goose* storytimes on parents and caregivers. Results of this longitudinal study indicated that the *Mainly Mother Goose* program did not significantly increase parent/caregiver engagement with their children in early literacy activities but it did increase the frequency of their visits to the library. In addition, 75% of parents reported that their confidence grew in using storytime activities and materials, while 88% responded that they used what they learned from the *Mainly Mother Goose* program at home. Overall, results indicated positive effects of the *Mainly Mother Goose* program on parents and caregivers over time. Additionally, while parents are often unconfident in their ability to support their child's literacy development, adults attending storytime using the ECRR philosophy showed an increase in knowledge about literacy development and motivation to support literacy development at home (Stewart, Bailey-White, Shaw, Compton, & Ghoting, 2014).

McKenzie and Stooke (2007) conducted a qualitative inquiry pertaining to how storytime is jointly constructed by the librarians, caregivers, and child participants. During their investigation of early literacy programs at two neighborhood public libraries in Canada, they found that librarians purposefully created space for adult conversations, thereby providing networks of information for adults while simultaneously providing children access to literacy experiences. Parents talked about many constructs including child development, childcare, and domestic life. Similarly, McKenzie and Stooke (2012) wrote observations regarding the various and sometimes conflicting purposes of early learning programs. For example, while librarians viewed the purpose of storytime to develop literacy skills, caregivers often viewed storytime as a place to socialize or as a reason to leave the house. When conflicts of purpose arose, negative consequences sometimes resulted, whereas positive results were produced when goals were aligned.

Turning to research regarding librarians, Martinez (2007) conducted an eight-month case study of early literacy programs in Maryland Public Libraries. Librarians tried to support children in their literacy development before school, but they had no formal training in early literacy instruction. Librarians took part in a one-day training session and were given developmentally appropriate planning sheets for various age groups. Results of the training and subsequent observations of storytimes indicated that librarians implemented their training and used the planning sheets that focused lessons on concepts of print, letter recognition, phonological awareness, and other literacy skills. Librarians also reported they were better able to select books in order to support growth in these areas.

Finally, Campana et al. (2016) conducted a much-needed study pertaining to the effects of storytime on children from birth to five years. Preliminary results indicated that a correlation exists between the early literacy concepts explored in storytime and children's literacy behaviors. Additionally, as part of an investigation regarding best practices in early literacy programs in public libraries in four countries (United States, Ireland, Canada, and Norway), Campbell-Hicks (2016) reported that libraries in New York were successful in creating community partnerships and intentionally teaching children literacy skills during storytime programming. Areas in which other countries excelled included attracting new library-users, developing relationships with daycares and parents, and creating comfortable and welcoming climates in libraries.

The purpose of the present ethnographic study was to provide a better understanding of how storytellers in a public library acted in ways to increase attendance at storytime, a free program that has been shown to contribute to early literacy development. The central question of this present study follows: How do storytellers in a low-income neighborhood increase attendance in storytime programming? Subquestions included: (1) How do storytellers recruit new patrons to storytime programming?, (2) How do storytellers encourage families to maintain attendance in storytime programming over time?, (3) What do storytellers perceive to be the benefits of storytime for families?, and (4) In what ways do the location of the library in a low-income neighborhood affect the avenues through which recruitment and maintenance are sought?

Qualitative research designs uniquely allow for the contextualization of collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the present study was particularly focused on how storytellers attract and engage families in a low-income neighborhood, an in-depth understanding of the context was necessary in order to analyze how the data is context-specific. In addition, McKenzie and Stooke's (2007) work highlighted the complexity of the communicative space, which is co-constructed during storytime. Specifically, an ethnographic approach to the present study allowed for the rich description of the culture that is created between storytellers and participants within the context of storytime programming.

Method

Research Site and Participants

As a public library in a low-income neighborhood that offers several weekly storytime programs on evenings and weekends, we used criterion sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in order to select Marshall Library as the context for this study. (Marshall Library and all names hereafter are pseudonyms used in order to protect the privacy of the library, its staff, its patrons, and surrounding school). Marshall's neighborhood is unique in that it is home to many immigrant and refugee families and is situated within three miles of a large research university. Demographic data from the seven public elementary schools that Marshall serves through outreach programming will be used as proxies for Marshall's population. Data from these seven schools are provided in *Table 1*. As illustrated in the table, Marshall Library serves an ethnically and linguistically diverse population of students. In addition, a majority of the students living in proximity to Marshall Library qualify for free or reduced lunch prices. Given its location, Marshall Library serves not only as a library, but also as a community center. Marshall offers many services within the library including free tax preparation, writing tutoring services, Girl Scout meetings, exercise classes, and much more. Furthermore, the library serves as a refuge for middle school students in the area looking for a place to go after school, often after such students are asked

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Schools Surrounding Marshall Library

Characteristics	Benedict	Wash	Bryan	Franklin	North	Clark	Fredrick
Distance (in miles)	.8	1.0	1.9	2.9	3.2	4.6	6.9
Number of Students	705	704	783	509	424	403	760
FRL %	76	59	28	28	80	72	63
Minority %	47	42	26	20	64	46	35
ELL %	21	15	7	2	36	25	9

Note. Data from this table are taken from the state's department of education website for the 2014-2015 school year. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent. FRL refers to students who qualify for free or reduced lunch prices. ELL refers to students who are considered English language learners.

to leave other local businesses. These demographic characteristics, which are often correlates of lower literacy achievement as described above, make Marshall Library a prime location for the present research study.

The focal participants in this present study are the "storytellers," a term used by the library staff members in order to describe their role while leading storytime sessions offered at the library. All nine storytellers in Marshall Library were invited and agreed to participate in the present study to allow for maximum variation sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to increase "the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives – an ideal in qualitative research" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). Thus, storytellers in the present study ranged in their storytime experiences, philosophies, and prior training.

Data Collection

In an effort to provide, as Agar (1996) suggests, a "Massive Overdetermination of Patterns" (p. 41), we remained in the field for 11 months from February until the following December. This time frame also enabled us to obtain "adequate coverage of temporal variation," (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 36) which allowed for the observation of changes in storytime staffing procedures, the growth in literacy development of participants, and the unique variations in storytime activities related to seasons and holidays. During the data collection period, we attended one to two storytime sessions per week. Our role was that of a participant observer, as we both engaged in activities and observed those activities with introspection and explicit awareness (Spradley, 1979 & 2016). Each observation included the 30 minutes designated as storytime, and at least the 15 minutes before and after each session. We recorded jottings in a notebook during the observation or immediately afterwards, as suggested by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011). After leaving the site, we transformed the jottings into field notes with the intent to create "thick descriptions" of the storytime culture (Geertz, 1973). We also attempted to capture the ordinary and the mundane events of storytime with a focus on what seemed to be significant to the participants (Emerson et al., 2011; Garfinkel, 1967). In total, we recorded and analyzed fieldnotes of 20 storytime sessions although we attended several more sessions in order to establish rapport and gain access to the setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

All nine storytellers participated in informal interviews with us before and after observations of their storytime programs. In addition, we conducted a minimum of one in-depth, semi-structured interview with each of the storytellers that participated in the study. The three main types of ethnographic interview questions were suggested by Spradley (1979) and included descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. Questions were further developed from the data collected during our time in the field as well as via the process of domain analysis. We used the interviews in order to help provide insight into what could not be observed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), such as perceptions and beliefs of the storytellers as well as to validate nascent interpretations and triangulate previously collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We also collected several artifacts including library signs, brochures, pamphlets, webpages, and photographs. In combination, the participant observations, formal and informal interviews, and the collection of documents provided an amalgamation of data leading to the point of saturation at which no new information was uncovered in the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Analysis

Throughout the data collection process, we used MAXQDA software to code and analyze the data. We began the analysis with open coding in order to remain open to "all analytic possibilities" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 5). In addition to coding, per Emerson et al.'s (2011) suggestions, we wrote in-process, analytic, and integrative memos enabling us to find emerging patterns, develop hypotheses, and refine the focus of our observations and interviews while still in the field. After writing memos, we often went back to previous data in order to code and recode events based on developing insight throughout the study. The subsequent process of focused coding resulted in the identification of relationships and variations among the data as well as the creation of categories (Emerson et al., 2011).

After coding the fieldnotes, we coded all semi-structured interviews via the process of structural coding, which allowed us to code data based on the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Following the structural coding, we conducted a second round of coding using the method of process coding (Saldaña, 2016) in order to specifically code the actions of the storytellers in recruiting and maintaining participation in storytime. Finally, we used code mapping (Saldaña, 2016) in order to categorize and organize the data into meaningful themes for further analysis. As suggested by Agar (1996), we abductively developed our hypotheses as patterns emerged throughout this analysis process.

Internal Validity and Reliability

Recognizing that qualitative research needs to be judged by different standards than traditional quantitative methods of investigation, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recast standards of internal and external validity, reliability, and generalizability under the overarching term "trustworthiness" and introduced new common language terms—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—in order to represent rigorous qualitative procedures (Babchuk, Guetterman, & Garrett, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Morse, 2018). Internal validity (or credibility) consists of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation—the latter concept originally proposed by Denzin (1978)—and incorporated the use of multiple methods, sources of data, investigators, and theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These strategies can be augmented by peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks. External validity and generalizability are to be approximated through transferability that can be achieved through thick description and maximum variation sampling. Reliability can be viewed as consistency (dependability and confirmability) and achieved in qualitative research through triangulation, peer review, researcher positioning, and internal and external audits (Babchuk et al. 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Building off the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Creswell and Miller (2000) proposed nine validity procedures for qualitative research including triangulation, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, collaboration with participants, the audit trail, thick/rich description, and peer debriefing. These researchers maintained that researchers utilize at least two of these strategies in order to maximize rigor in qualitative investigations (and see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Following these criteria in order to enhance internal validity or credibility in the present study, we spent extensive time in the field (11 months) and triangulated data sources in order to construct meaningful, recognizable, and holistic patterns in the context of storytime. We also included low inference descriptors such as participant quotes and contextual descriptions to enhance the study's internal validity. Furthermore, as underscored by Lincoln and Guba (1985), we took to heart the charge of providing "sufficient descriptive data" (p. 298) and used it in order to contribute to the potential transferability of the research. We enhanced reliability or consistency (also known was dependability or confirmability) through procedures of triangulation and peer-review mentioned above, along with an audit trail to evince the rigorous methods of data collection and analysis we iteratively employed as the present study progressed (Babchuk et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Positioning of the Researchers

According to Agar (1996): "The ethnographic job is a privilege, and it carries a *responsibility* to get it right and an *authority* that allows the professional to make that claim" (Agar, 1996, p. 15, emphasis in original). Although we agree with Agar regarding the privilege of ethnographic work and the immense responsibility it demands, we exercise caution with the rest of his claim. "To get it right" implies that there exists a singular "right" to be discovered, whereas we do not subscribe to the notion that there is but one objective reality that can be independently and objectively assessed. In addition, we would be apt to change the term "authority" to that of "entrustment," implying the moral obligation to make inductively derived claims while respecting the participants involved.

So, it is with this privilege and caution in mind that we share the philosophical perspectives and theoretical lenses through which we collected and analyzed the data presented in this article. Implementing combined teaching experiences spanning kindergarten through collegiate levels, we have witnessed the multiple realities that are constructed for students in classrooms based on historical inequities that exist as a consequence of race, gender, culture, and especially class. We are interested in the ways through which social class and its subsequent realities influence school achievement, particularly in the area of literacy. Thus, we align closely with the epistemological and ontological view of critical social science, as it is our shared belief that research can be a powerful tool in order to combat this inequity.

For the present research, we actively attempted to minimize the effects of these fundamental assumptions, biases, and interpretations by writing memos after each field visit to capture and analyze our reactions throughout the research process. We explored our concerns with issues of educational inequity based on our past work experience and attempted to "mak[e] the familiar strange" (Erickson, 1984, p. 62) while in this space. Since schools are products of middle-class norms, we realized that we might unfairly privilege those activities that align with such norms and potentially miss other important literacy activities that families engage in at the library. Thus, throughout the study, we reflected on the ways in which our identities might result in unwarranted bias in an effort to remain open-minded to all analytic possibilities.

Results

Throughout the duration of the study, the storytellers at Marshall used two terms in order to describe the storytime participants: "drop-ins" and "regulars." They referred to patrons who were either new to storytime or who come infrequently as "drop-ins." The storytellers did not know the names of "drop-ins" and often placed nametags in the area so that they could begin to know them. Conversely, there were several families that returned to storytime each week. Storytellers referred to these participants as "regulars." For the purpose of our present study, we sought to explore not only how storytellers increased the number of "drop-ins" at storytime but also how they actively worked to transition "drop-ins" into the status of "regulars." We will, therefore, report on the two processes separately.

Recruiting Storytime "Drop-ins"

In order to increase storytime participation, the storytellers' first step was to encourage new children and caregivers to attend a storytime session. They worked in many purposeful ways in order to accomplish this goal. Two themes emerged regarding how storytellers recruited "drop-ins" to storytime, including (1) appealing to community members to enter the physical space of the library and (2) appealing to current library patrons to attend storytime. By targeting recruitment efforts at individuals in the community as well as those individuals already present in the library, storytellers maximized their attendance.

Appealing to Community Members to Enter the Library. According to the storytellers, one of the ways in which they recruit storytime participants is by first encouraging community members "in the door" of the library. Sometimes the way they recruited people into the library was explicitly asking community members to attend a storytime program. The storytellers were well-versed in "elevator talks" during which they would deliver a short explanation of storytime to members of the community followed by an invitation to join, all while going about their daily lives. Tonya, a long-time storyteller, explained a time she was standing in line behind a mom and her preschooler at a grocery store, saying: "The cashier said something to them about reading and I jumped in. I said, 'Hey, you know, all of the libraries offer preschool storytime, which you could bring your child to.'" Interestingly, the storytellers also noted that current "regulars" effectively recruited "drop-ins" via word of mouth. In fact, during observations we noted the addition of friends, family, and neighbors of the "regulars." Other ways in which storytellers at Marshall acted to encourage people into the library specifically for storytime included multiple methods of advertising. Marshall staff created and handed-out fliers for storytime, filled with bright images and positive messages regarding the benefits of storytime. In addition, storytellers advertised for storytime on local television stations and often set-up booths at local community events in order to promote storytime attendance. Online descriptions and times were also posted on the city's library website.

The storytellers at Marshall Library also lead many "outreach events" during which they lead storytimes in other parts of the city, a need which was addressed in the literature to meet the changing needs of working families (McCune, 2010). These outreach events were typically scheduled monthly and most often occurred at daycares or community centers. Darlene, who facilitated storytime outreach at a local community center, shared her reflections after doing an outreach event: "Was I able to get them to want to come into the library building? 'Cuz that's what outreach is all about. You want to reach them and get them to come… through your doors." Yet, the storytellers were also realistic regarding the needs of the community in which they serve. Shannon, for example, acknowledged that many of the kids who are served in outreach events likely have working parents and "probably wouldn't get storytime," if it were held only in the library. Thus, while outreach events serve as a way to encourage people "in the door" of the library, it is also done simply to provide more children with early literacy experiences.

Conversely, Marshall staff often used other library resources in order to encourage community members into the physical space of the library and then, indirectly, recruit the children for storytime. For example, Marshall library offered a variety of free programs and services such as yoga class, tax preparation services, writing tutors, and access to the internet. In addition, due to the high percentage of students in the area who qualify for free/reduced lunch prices, free lunch was offered daily in the library during the summer months which helped recruit additional patrons to the library. Staff members were aware that, once people are in the library, they are more likely to "drop-in" to other library programs such as storytime. After reflecting on the variety of resources offered, Darlene stated: "I see how much they need the library, and especially this library in this side of town." In order to meet this need, library programs were often scheduled consecutively so patrons could easily attend many events.

Appealing to Patrons to Attend Storytime. If patrons arrived at the library for resources or services other than storytime, as mentioned above, the storytellers were often effective at recruiting them for storytime through a variety of purposeful actions. At the most basic level, all those individuals present in the library were typically invited (over the intercom) to attend. While reading a book or finishing-up another activity, for example, patrons might hear, "Please join us for song, story, and craft," followed by an invitation to meet in the children's section of the library. This announcement was the most impersonal but it was often only the first of many verbal invitations offered to patrons. Some patrons appeared to listen and respond to this announcement, while others who were deeply engaged in an activity seemed oblivious to the message.

At the next level of recruitment, the library staff tried to make storytime more visible within the library space through advertisements and even the location of storytime itself. Library staff frequently created posters and bulletin boards regarding storytime and posted them throughout children's section of the library, as well as the large entryway. For example, during October, we found a new poster that welcomed families to "Spooktacular Storytime" and encouraged children to wear their costumes. In order to further increase visibility, some storytellers led storytime in the middle of children's section of the library, rather than behind closed doors as was typically done. Shannon, who was considered the main storyteller, reflected during an interview that moving storytime to this open area increased attendance of "drop-ins," who could now see storytime and, join if they wished.

Finally, at the highest level of recruitment, storytellers often offered personalized invitations to all children and families present in the library, both before and during storytime. When storytellers directly approached individuals (or a group of individuals) and offered a verbal invitation to join storytime, they were most often met with success. Some storytellers, such as Amber, were especially successful at this method of recruitment, often using terms of endearment to draw in more children. As one example from our field notes, when a girl around the age of eight walked through the aisle of books, Amber addressed her, explaining: "'Hello, come join us' and she joined the group. Meanwhile a smaller girl with the similar braids and beads approached. Amber said, 'Come join us, beautiful!' She, too, joined the group." Other storytellers, particularly those with limited experience in leading storytime, were less likely to offer a personalized verbal invitation to join. In these instances, storytime followed a more rigid pattern of events in which activities and books were not to be interrupted; this protocol sharply contrasted the open dialogue and engagement exhibited by Amber and other storytellers.

In order to investigate whether such verbal personalized invitations to join merely seemed successful because storytellers were inviting customers who were already in route to attend storytime, we purposefully observed all library customers who came close enough to the storytime rug for a verbal invitation to be extended and we further recorded what happened when no invitation was given. Several instances, similar to the following, were repeatedly documented in fieldnotes:

> During the story, a man, woman, and three boys walked by the gray carpet area. The youngest boy looked to be around six years old. They looked at the gray carpet area and walked on.
>
> There was no invitation to join.

It did not seem to matter whether the children approached storytime by themselves, with other children, or with adults. Unless the storyteller offered a personalized invitation, most patrons quietly observed the area and then left. Indeed, personalized invitations to join did have important consequences in terms of recruiting participants and some storytellers talked about their purposeful attempts to increase attendance using this method. As an illustration regarding this point, Darlene stated: "So, usually I'm really lucky because sometimes you'll get families on the computer over there and you'll just say, 'We're doing storytime. Do you want to come?' And they'll come and they'll be first timers." As a longtime children's librarian with much experience as a storyteller, we surmised that Darlene was particularly effective in her warm and caring approach to personalized recruitment. As a result, the number of children in attendance in her sessions grew throughout the session as she frequently invited children both before storytime started and throughout the thirty-minute program.

Creating a Circle of Maintenance for "Regulars"

After families or children "dropped-in" to storytime, the storytellers acted in multiple ways to transition them into "regulars." The four ways in which this transition occurred were (1) facilitating meaningful learning experiences, (2) fostering enjoyment through participation, (3) developing nurturing relationships, and (4) offering flexibility in storytime expectations. In the space of the library, these four components reinforced one another creating a circle of maintenance, in which patrons returned to the library weekly for storytime programming.

Facilitating Meaningful Learning Experiences. Perhaps the most explicit way in which storytellers built their constituency at storytime is by offering early learning experiences. Tonya illustrated this point when she stated: "Reading aloud is essential for language and, like I said, I think a lot of parents know that. That's why they show up." In order to prepare for the read aloud experience, storytellers typically picked a theme of their choice and then chose three related books along with finger plays, flannel boards, songs, dances, and sometimes a craft in order to supplement the program. Storytellers were explicit about the purpose of these additional activities. Shannon, for example, said: "In theory, it's… getting kids ready to go to preschool. It's about sitting. It's about listening… making sure they know their colors, their shapes, their numbers, their alphabet." Thus, while storytime is explicitly focused on reading stories, children were exposed to a wide variety of academic and social learning experiences.

In fact, when storytellers were asked questions regarding the ways in which storytime prepares children for success in school, most storytellers focused on the development of socially appropriate school behaviors rather than on early literacy development. During storytime, the cultural norm was for children to remain seated (although there was flexibility for those who were young). Other school-like behaviors, such as hand raising, were observed on several occasions. Storytellers used the flannel board and craft materials in order to encourage children to wait their turn. Even the language used by storytellers purposefully echoed what might be heard in the classroom. For example, the children were asked to "sit crisscross applesauce" and were often referred to by the storytellers as "friends." Furthermore, it was common for children to reference the storyteller as "teacher," and Darlene noted in an interview that children view Shannon's Tuesday night storytime, in particular, as "school." Thus, while explicit signage, brochures, and storytime schedules highlighted the literacy aspects of storytime—in practice—storytellers also acknowledged the importance of developing socially appropriate school behaviors.

Learning at storytime was also not limited to the children. Some of the work that storytellers did specifically targeted the parents. Storytellers felt that, by teaching the parents about literacy development, they could extend the benefits of storytime into the home environment. Stephanie illustrated this phenomenon when she stated: "We're only with the kids for 20 minutes. They're with them all the time." The storytellers, trained in ECRR, addressed the importance of showing families how to interact with their children while reading books in order to keep them engaged. They purposefully modeled additional early literacy practices that families could learn. As Stewart et al. (2014) suggested, the inclusion of such practices in storytime can, in fact, lead to increased parental support of literacy in the home.

Fostering Enjoyment through Participation. While the primary focus of storytime was on learning, the storytellers also recognized the importance of fostering enjoyment through participation in literacy activities. They acknowledged that learning and fun can coincide during storytime in order to create an experience that both children and caregivers find worthwhile. However, storytellers differed in their abilities to create engaging experiences for children. Those individuals with a genuine interest in storytime were able to deliver an energetic storytime in which the "books come alive," as exemplified in the excerpt below:

> Shannon read *The Big Wide-Mouth Frog*. She read it in a slow and dramatic voice. She asked the children what they thought would happen next. One child predicted the frog would be eaten. Shannon turned her face away and said she couldn't look. Then she read the next page and the frog was not eaten after all.

As can be seen, Shannon used engaging expressions, interacted directly with the children, and brought them into the story by asking them to predict what was going to happen next. Many storytellers explicitly identified these characteristics as essential to a good storytime presentation. Conversely, when the storyteller read in a monotonous tone and a hurried pace, it seemed neither the children or the storyteller enjoyed the experience.

Another important component in fostering engagement was including fun activities. When asked how she would describe storytime to families, for example, Jen stated: "I would try to drive home that it's not just… somebody sitting and reading books for thirty minutes. You might be up and down doing activities, or motion, and song, singing with actions, too." Sometimes these activities served literacy purposes and were associated with the storytime theme while other times they were used as "centering" activities in order to help the kids. Flannel board activities, which often allowed the children to come up and manipulate the pieces, along with songs and dances were among the most common movement activities included during storytime. While parental engagement during storytime was notably limited during much of storytime, caregivers seemed to return their attention to the program when their children were actively involved. Caregivers sometimes offered words of encouragement, clapped their hands, and recorded photos or videos of their children with their phones. These caregivers seemed to take pride in watching their children perform a variety of activities.

In addition to the activities described above, craft time was a consistent feature of the Sunday family storytime and also proved to be an engaging activity for the children. As the final activity each Sunday, children and their caregivers sat down at the long gray table full of colorful materials and supplies. From designing paper airplanes to using principles of science in order to make butter, the number of participants at storytime almost always increased during these activities. For example, during one storytime, "I noticed several of the adults and children who earlier passed by storytime on the gray carpet now sat at the table doing the craft." Although not every storyteller felt it was fair to let these late arrivals participate, Darlene said: "I don't care. I just need to touch that child no matter how." However, all of the storytellers agreed that keeping the children interested and excited about storytime was important to increasing and maintaining storytime attendance. Tonya summarized this consensus by saying: "I mean, truly if the kids want to come back the parents will bring them, you know? This is a very kid-centered society."

Developing Nurturing Relationships. Another resounding theme triangulated through interviews and observations was the importance of making all families feel welcome in the library. The library staff greeted all patrons upon entry into the building and sought to maintain this welcoming culture throughout all areas of the library. They were conscientious about pursuing this goal, even when hiring new staff members. Shannon described that, while it is important for librarians to love reading, Marshall Library is looking for more from their staff members. She stated: "We need people who like to help people, who like people, who aren't going to hide behind the desk." Storytellers frequently greeted patrons, often doing so by name. They smiled, engaged in small talk, and frequently offered their assistance throughout the library. Often times, these interactions between storytellers and patrons led directly to a personal invitation to the patron to join storytime.

Acknowledging that the patrons of Marshall Library are linguistically and culturally diverse, the storytellers also talked about making people feel welcome by including themes that focused on multiple cultures, counting in multiple languages, and being sensitive of the multiple cultural beliefs when planning themes for storytime. In a storytime theme about grandparents, for example, Stephanie asked an open-ended question that provided space for multiple linguistic representations. Stephanie asked: "What are some different names for your grandma and grandpa?" One child replied with 'grandma' and Stephanie wrote it on the board. Fadila, another girl, answered: "I do but it's in a different language." Stephanie said: "That's okay." After the child shared, Stephanie then did her best to represent this word on the board by consulting with the child's caregiver. It was clear that in the space of storytime, all ways of knowing were honored and appreciated.

Even so, data analysis revealed that certain storytimes sessions consistently had more "regulars" than others. Sunday storytime, for example, rarely had "regulars." It was led each week by a different storyteller, since no staff member wanted to work every Sunday. We quickly realized that, as the storyteller changed, so too did the children that attended. They were almost always "drop-ins," recruited from other parts of the library who just happened to be there during storytime. Conversely, during Tuesday night storytime, most families in attendance were considered "regulars." Shannon consistently led this storytime and, as mentioned above, these children often referred to Shannon's storytime as "school." This consistency in the storyteller scheduling enabled Shannon to build strong and nurturing relationships with the attendees. On any given Tuesday night, Shannon could be seen picking up the children, tickling them, and laughing with them when she was "on the floor." In addition, not only did Shannon know the names of most of the children and their families, but they also referred to her by name which was atypical for the Sunday session.

When asked questions regarding how she maintains regular participation in her storytime session, Shannon acknowledged that building relationships with the caregivers is essential because "kids can't drive themselves to the library yet." Before and after storytime, families often waited around for their turn to talk with Shannon. They spoke about a variety of matters including whether or not they would be able to attend storytime the following week, changes in their family structure such as new babies, and upcoming events in their lives. Below is a field note excerpt of one such conversation:

> [At the end of storytime] a little girl approached Shannon and said, "thank you." They continued to engage in a conversation about the girls 4th birthday. Shannon said that she missed the girl's 4th birthday and how fast time goes… The woman then said that Shannon has seen her little girl grow up since she was 18 months old. Shannon looked at the little girl and said she would be there for her anytime she needed any kind of books.

Furthermore, families often let Shannon know if they planned to miss storytime the following week and explained previous absences to her. Due to the consistency of both the storyteller and the participants, Shannon's weekly Tuesday night storytime felt more like a formalized program in which participants registered and paid for services.

Other staff members at the library were aware that some storytimes, including Shannon's, consistently drew larger crowds. They spoke about the importance of building relationships with the participants, which is more likely to occur with consistent scheduling. Darlene, another longtime storyteller who was skilled at building relationships with families, said the following:

> And I'm not saying that somebody's better than the other, I'm just saying they're comfortable with that same person. That's why Shannon gets the same kids every week because she's their teacher. Sundays is a little bit harder because you have different people doing storytime.

While the library management was in the process of training all library staff members to lead storytime, the storytellers seemed to be aware that attendance at storytime was linked directly to the storyteller. Eventually management picked up on this trend as well. Jen stated that they "kind of figured out that when certain people do it they get bigger crowds." It seemed that a transition back to more permanent storyteller scheduling was in order.

Offering Flexibility in Storytime Expectations. Posted on the "Upcoming Events" board, which was also the backdrop of several storytime sessions, was a poster that outlined the expectations of storytime. Library staff clearly wrote the expectations for the adults rather than the children. They were written in an acrostic poem using the word "storytime" as can be seen below:

STORYTIME EXPECTATIONS
Sit Quietly
Turn off your phone
Open your ears
Remember to participate
Your children will follow your example
Talk with friends **AFTER** storytime
It's about the love of learning
Model for your children
Everyone sing and dance
Storytime is FUN!

The storytime brochure created for all public libraries in the city also included similar expectations. These formally-written directives seemed to suggest that storytime events require active participation not only of the children but of the adults as well. Contrast this dynamic with the following vignette that exhibits what these expectations looked like in practice at the library:

> Salima and her mom joined me at end of the table near the gray rug. Salima mumbled something, then grabbed a book, and sat down to read. Her mother sat across from her and looked at her phone. Amber arrived and sat on the gray rug. She looked at the girl and smiled saying, "Want to come sit?" [Salima] verbalized nothing but immediately stood up and returned the book to the shelf. She joined Amber on the rug. Amber began having a conversation with [Salima] as they both sat cross-legged on the floor by saying, "Hello, how are you? You look very pretty

Table 2
Library Learning Times (Storytimes) at Marshall

Title	Age Range	Week Day	Time	Storyteller Pseudonym
Baby Storytime	Birth-18 mo.	Mondays	10:35 - 10:55 a.m.	Cindy
Toddler Time	18 mo.-36 mo.	Wednesdays	10:35 - 10:55 a.m.	Shannon
		Thursdays	10:35 - 10:55 a.m.	Stephanie
Preschool Storytime	3 yrs. – 5 yrs.	Tuesdays	7:00 - 7:30 p.m.	Shannon
		Wednesdays	10:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Tonya
		Thursdays	10:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Tonya
Family Storytime	Entire Family	Sundays	1:30 - 2:00 p.m.	Rotates

> today." The conversation continued about the girl's jewelry, her Valentine's box, and her weekend. As Amber and Salima engaged in conversation, Salima's mother remained sitting in the blue chair at the table one chair away from me. She continued looking at her phone.

As this vignette evidences, Salima's mom was not actively "model(ing) for her children" or "remember(ing) to participate," as outlined in the expectations. Furthermore, she was looking at her phone for the majority of the time, although they are explicitly told to turn them off. However, Salima's mom was arguably the most engaged of all adult participants that day. Although there were six children in attendance for storytime, she was the only adult that was even present for storytime. Two other adults stopped by during craft time in order to check-in with their children but left shortly after.

In this storytime session (and others), it became clear that the expectations regarding the poster and in the brochure for adult participation were, in fact, not "expected" at all. Caregivers most often spent their time either using their phones, talking with other caregivers, or doing activities in other parts of the library. In some instances, we did not observe any sign of a child's family before, during, or after storytime; storytellers noted that children from the surrounding community often come to the library by themselves. Darlene talked about two girls who come to the library nearly every weekend, but she has never met their parents. She said: [The girls] came at 11 – 11:30 when we opened the door and left at 7:00 that night with no lunch and no supper… and, yeah, we see that quite often with other children, too." Despite the absence of a caregiver, these girls were still invited to attend storytime.

Based on both the interviews and observations, we concluded that the purpose of the storytime expectations sign was to keep caregivers from engaging in behaviors that disrupted storytime, rather than to increase their participation in the activities. Consequences were invoked only when that boundary between lack of participation and disruption of storytime was crossed. Therefore, the storytellers did not intervene when Salima's mom spent all of storytime using her phone or when caregivers were not in attendance. Instead, storytellers referred to the sign only in situations such as the following:

> We have some daycare providers who come in and they just feel like, "Okay (clap), somebody else is watching the kids right now so I don't have to pay attention to them so I am going to carry on a conversation in the back of the room. Loudly. Not even in a quiet voice, with my friend, because the kids are minded."

It became clear that the expectations explicitly stated in the signs and brochures served not as directives for the families, but rather a tool that could be used by the storyteller if the adults were interfering with storytime. The storytellers worked hard in order to prepare literacy rich opportunities for the children and only confronted caregivers when their actions took away from the experience of others.

In addition, although the storytime signs and brochures designated specific ages for each program (as seen in Table 2), in practice children of all ages were welcome to attend. When providing oral invitations to patrons, storytellers rarely considered age distinctions. Shannon spoke of the importance of this flexibility saying: "It's like well if I tell the 18 month [child] to go then the whole family's going to leave and then the older brother's not going to be able to enjoy storytime". This type of flexibility was especially important for families with multiple children. Rather than dictate attendance, the age requirements on the brochures seemed to provide patrons with an idea regarding the target audience storytellers had in mind while planning a developmentally appropriate program.

Another explicit tip for a "successful storytime" is to "be on time." It is followed by the explanation that "storytimes are short and every minute is full of fun and learning opportunities." In reality, however, it was quite common for families, or even children by themselves, to arrive late to storytime. When participants arrived late, most storytellers would pause and greet them, making it known that their presence was welcome. Such interruptions were common during storytimes not just within the first few minutes, but throughout the entire duration of the program as demonstrated by the following fieldnote: "During the book, another woman and young girl entered the room. Shannon paused and said hi to the girl by name. The girl responded with a smile, "Hi Ms. Shannon!" and then joined the rug." While the fieldnote documents the late arrival of a "regular," many "drop-ins" were also absorbed into storytime who did not come to the library with the intent of going to storytime but happened to wander into the children's section of the library during storytime.

The flexibility of storytime expectations in practice is further demonstrated by the fact that, although formal documents said that storytime is 30 minutes long, the ending time was much more flexible. While this fact was documented in several fieldnotes, the staff members also acknowledged this finding in their dialogue together: "The staff member asked when storytime is over and Amber responded 'two-ish.'" That same day, a full 15 minutes after the end of storytime as written on the brochure, we recorded the following: "I asked if [Amber] would like help cleaning up the craft supplies. She said that she usually leaves them out for a while in case other kids would like to complete the craft." This practice of extending the length of storytime was a common occurrence, particularly on Sundays, when a craft was involved and materials were left out. In fact, providing continued access to the craft did increase the number of children who were involved in storytime. Not only did this practice enable participation of those individuals who arrived late, but it also allowed children who might be less comfortable in a group setting to participate in the literacy related craft independently.

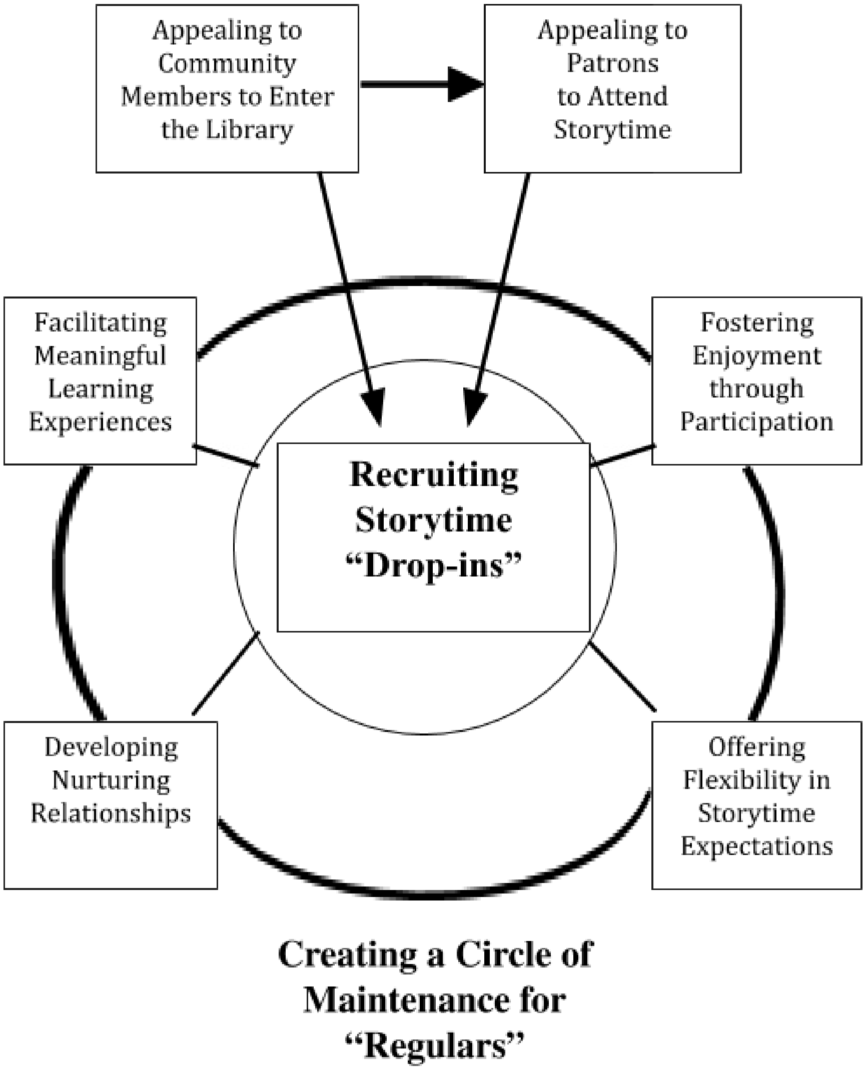
Discussion

Public libraries, alongside families and schools, have taken on the task of providing children with early learning experiences such as storytime in order to support their success in school. Given national statistics regarding achievement based on social class, these services are perhaps most essential for individuals who live in areas of lower socioeconomic status. The purpose of the present study was to explore ways in which storytellers at a public library acted to recruit and maintain participation in this free, voluntary program. Understanding these processes may help contribute to identifying more nuanced approaches in reaching a larger audience, thereby increasing the program's potential benefits. Theoretical generalization of the ways in which these storytellers recruited and maintained attendance at storytime may also serve as a resource for other community and school organizations seeking to broaden their participant base.

Through a combination of field notes, interviews, and document analyses, we found two major avenues by which storytellers recruited "drop-ins," to storytime and four avenues by which storytellers established maintenance of "regulars" at storytime. These six processes of recruitment and maintenance did not occur in isolation but rather in interactive and mutually supportive ways. Figure 1 is a proposed schematic regarding the ways in which these six processes worked together. When storytellers appealed to community members to enter the physical space of the library, sometimes they recruited them directly for storytime by providing an advertisement, an outreach event, or an

Figure 1

The Process of How Storytellers Recruit and Maintain Participation at Storytime



Appealing to Community Members to Enter the Library
Appealing to Patrons to Attend Storytime
Facilitating Meaningful Learning Experiences
Fostering Enjoyment through Participation
Recruiting Storytime "Drop-ins"
Developing Nurturing Relationships
Offering Flexibility in Storytime Expectations
Creating a Circle of Maintenance for "Regulars"

elevator talk. Other times, however, storytellers recruited new patrons to enter the library so that the patrons could access library resources such as computers or adult programming. While in the library, storytellers could appeal to the current library patrons to attend storytime via in-library advertising or verbal invitations. Once a patron or family of patrons "dropped-in" for storytime, the storytellers at Marshall actively worked in four ways to provide an experience that encouraged them to return to future storytime programs including facilitating meaningful learning experiences, fostering enjoyment through participation, developing nurturing relationships, and offering flexibility in storytime expectations.

These six processes are not linked in linear, monodirectional pathways; rather, the maintenance of patrons at storytime varied based on the needs and desires of each patron at any given point. For example, we observed a family who initially became "regulars" in an effort to support their child's literacy development, but continued to be "regulars" because the flexibility of the expectations allowed the father to study for a higher degree while his children were busy at storytime. Another family that moved across town and could have experienced similar learning experiences at a closer library chose, instead, to drive across town to Marshall because of the relationship they have with one of the storytellers. Thus, a "circle of maintenance" was created in which the four processes of storytellers worked together at various times in various ways to support family participation at storytime to various degrees.

While we were unable to identify any published empirical studies in the literature regarding the ways in which storytellers recruit and maintain participation in storytime programs, this schematic model is well supported by the anecdotal and observational articles published in the literature. For example, Hughes-Hassell et al. (2007) addressed the importance of offering storytime in the evenings and on the weekends in order to provide access to working-class families. Interestingly, Shannon acknowledged the success of Marshall's Tuesday evening and Sunday storytimes, but also noted the sharp contrast in program needs across the city with less of a need for evening and weekend storytime in some parts. She noted: "The north and the south part of [the city] are very different," alluding to the well-known social class divide. Thus, Marshall staff acknowledged and responded to the needs of the community in which they serve.

The storytellers at Marshall also worked in order to provide a nonjudgmental and culturally responsive space within the library. The traditional library culture of silence and rigidity was re-envisioned at Marshall as an exciting, community-oriented space that is welcoming of families; this is in line with the changes in library programming reported by Celano and Neuman (2015). In addition, storytellers acknowledged the challenges that working-class families face and the difficulty of finding the time to attend storytime at the end of the long day. As a result, families were welcome to arrive late, bring children of all ages, and even complete other tasks while their children participated in storytime. In attending to these issues addressed in the literature, storytellers at Marshall served to nurture supportive and understanding relationships with patrons, an important step in helping families make the transition from "drop-ins" to "regulars."

In addition to flexible programming and welcoming staff, the literature also spoke of the importance of outreach events in broadening the constituency of storytime (e.g., Becker, 2012; Johnson, 2015; McCune, 2010). Marshall's outreach programs included several daycares in the area, two community centers, and a behavioral intervention program which significantly increased the number of children exposed to storytime. Although it is not always possible given family constraints, the relationships children make with librarians in outreach settings can serve as a way to bring families "in the door" of the library. This relationship carried over into the library space may then continue to contribute to the "cycle of maintenance."

Limitations and Future Research

In the present study, we sought to contribute to existing literature by offering a contextualized account of the work that these storytellers did in recruiting and maintaining family participation in storytime programming. However, the present study has limitations. First, we focused primarily on actions, insights, and perceptions of the storytellers and thus interviews were not conducted with the children and caregivers attending storytime events. Their insights are instrumental in more fully understanding the process of building a storytime constituency. Second, observations were limited to storytime programming and the time immediately surrounding it. Attending outreach events and other library programs for children could provide fruitful new data for exploration. Third, qualitative studies of libraries set within other cultural contexts, specifically those of higher socioeconomic status, might prove useful in better understanding the aspects of attraction and maintenance unique to issues of socioeconomic status. Fourth, as teachers spanning the kindergarten to collegiate level, we realize that our own educational experiences and philosophies may have influenced our perceptions of this literacy program and the actions of the storytellers. Although we attempted to decrease any potential biases by recording memos and actively seeking to remain open to all analytic possibilities, we acknowledge that it is impossible to completely bracket out our experiences. Finally, although we attempted to maximize the external validity or transferability of the present study through the use of maximum variation sampling and the provision rich descriptions, the generalizability of this present study is ultimately limited to the theoretical.

Due to the widespread inception of storytime across the nation, more research is warranted regarding the potential benefits of storytime programs as well as further examination of what is occurring in this shared space that blurs the lines between public and family life. Specifically, research efforts could focus on exploring the potential benefits of the partnership between libraries and schools in achieving their shared goal of fostering early literacy development. While storytellers are working to recruit and maintain engagement in storytime events, their reach is limited to individuals already in the library, outreach events, or happenstance occurrences in the community. Schools offer what could be considered the ultimate outreach venue where the two entities may merge in ways that extend the library doors to the school, creating a seamless enterprise of literacy support for children in the area. Storytellers could be invited into the school space to do storytime and to build relationships with children and family that are pivotal to their return to storytime. Similarly, teachers might venture into the library space for storytime to assist in the transfer of relational attachment from the teacher to the storyteller.

Further inquiry also could focus on finding a balance between flexibility and structure in storytime programming. Although signage at the library explicitly stated rigid expectations for storytime, in practice the storytellers were flexible in regard to time, age limits, and amount of parent and child participation. This flexibility enabled caregivers and children increased options for storytime and it responded to differences in personality styles and individual preferences. Conversely, based upon observations and in-depth interviews, structure in terms of staff scheduling was instrumental in transitioning "drop-ins" to "regulars." The continuity from one week to the next allowed for the creation of a culture-sharing community, as could be seen in the Tuesday evening storytime. In addition to public libraries, other community services aimed at supporting families might gain valuable insight from this unique balance as well.

For nearly eight decades, a culture has been developing within storytimes in which librarians, families, and children learn simultaneously about literacy, literacy development, and one another. This free, voluntary event offers a way to provide children with early literacy experiences to support school readiness. While there is much anecdotal evidence and assumptions regarding ways in which adults and children are attracted to attend and maintain participation in storytime, there has been a paucity of scientific inquiry focusing on the ways in which this involvement occurs. Currently, schools, families, and community services are working tirelessly towards early literacy goals but are often doing so simultaneously and separately rather than collaboratively. The present study takes a fundamental step towards a greater understanding of both the complexity and the potential benefits involved in creating long-term partnerships between families, schools, libraries, and other community organizations to support literacy development.

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