

SHARP Stories



SHARP Literacy: Impact Beyond The Classroom

People often ask what impact SHARP Literacy has had on students throughout the years. We conduct assessments that measure proficiency, engagement and persistence relating to vocabulary, language skills and math as well as collaboration and communication with the educators. There are also a number of intangible ways that SHARP is making a positive difference.

To talk about that, we sat down with Litza Janowski, a 2nd grade teacher at Blessed Sacrament School in Milwaukee for 25 years. Litza and Blessed Sacrament have been SHARP champions since the beginning and have seen firsthand the impact that SHARP continues to have on students and others in our community beyond the classroom setting. In fact, Litza was part of the development of the initial SHARP curriculum focused on “Weather and Seasons,” and her 2nd grade class was one of the first to incorporate it into the classroom. She shared some key observations on SHARP’s impact over time:

Promotes “Artful Thinking”*

While the curriculum has evolved over the years to stay relevant, the focus continues to be hands-on, visual arts-based programming to help spark curiosity and a love of learning. That focus fosters a connection between words on a page and a more complex understanding of a concept.

Litza even challenges her students to think about what a specific word “looks” like. Are the letters tall or short? How does the word feel or smell? What color is it? This type of approach is powerful in engaging the brain in different ways beyond memorization and helps develop critical thinking to help students understand the world. It is especially helpful in bilingual communities like those at many SHARP schools, including Blessed Sacrament, where students are starting to learn and master English.

By focusing on information beyond just the words, students learn how to use their surroundings and other resources such as books and experiences to gather information about themselves and their communities.



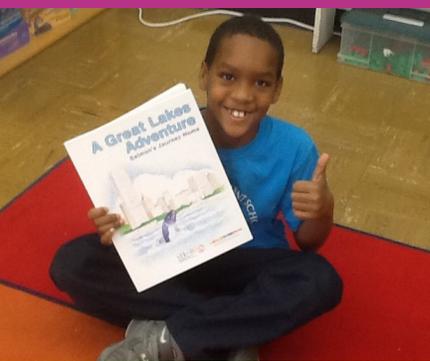
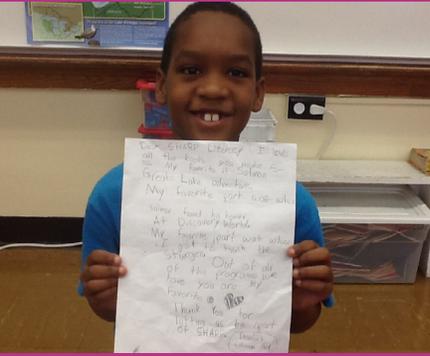
Provides Powerful Experiences

SHARP programs are fun and intriguing! There are special guests, fun educational tours and engaging activities, all with an exposure to learning, creating and artful thinking:

- Students work with writers and artists to become authors and illustrators of SHARP’s **We Love to Learn** books. This experience helps them gain confidence and pride in their own abilities, especially when they see themselves and/or their school in print. Litza is always excited when students see Blessed Sacrament listed as helping author books in the library. There’s great power in having a sense of accomplishment: “We did this! I am a published author!”
- Students work with local artists to create community murals and other art projects that visually tell a story related to what they are studying in the classroom. Over the years students have created more than 27 installed works as part of the **Community Murals** program, many of which can be seen in public places throughout various neighborhoods. The students in Litza’s classroom at Blessed Sacrament were part of the 2003 multi-school and student collaboration that created the *Mosaic of Culture* that is still on display at General Mitchell International Airport.

Students are invited and encouraged to participate in public speaking opportunities, including radio shows, media interviews and presentations to other students and adults to explain concepts and ideas that they have been working on.

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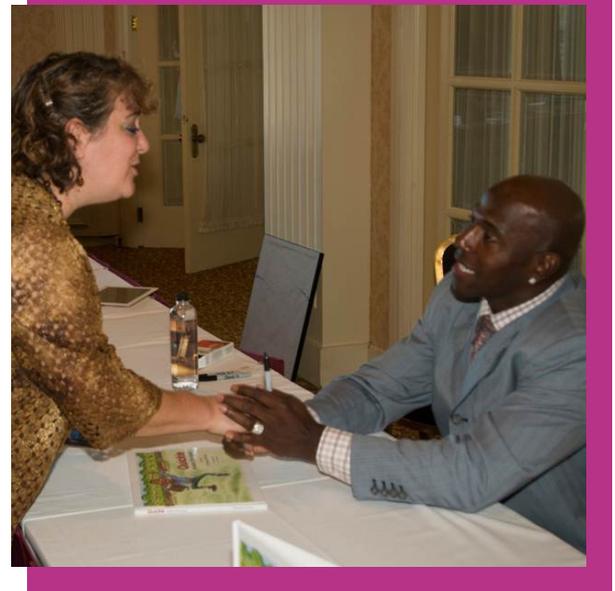
Fosters Community Connections

Students involved in the SHARP program hail from diverse neighborhoods. But many of them don't have the opportunity to venture far from home other than to school. Our students get to meet local sports figures, media personalities, corporate executives and community leaders who share stories about their lives, jobs and experiences. This makes students feel important and connected to inspiring people who they look up to and are interested in their long-term success.

There is great value in meeting and talking to others from beyond a small circle but within the local community. Students are encouraged to ask questions, show interest in others and develop a connection with people they may never have had the opportunity to meet.

The students at Blessed Sacrament participate in the **Reading With the Golden Eagles** program where they get to interact with student athletes from Marquette University (MU).

While the focus of the program is to read a book together, the sessions also involve Q & As and sharing stories. The interactions and mentoring with the students have made our **Reading With Programs** very popular with the student athletes at MU and Carroll University as well! Learning about what others do, where they live and their unique perspectives helps students better understand their own role and future potential as a valued member of the larger community.



Encourages and Validates Educators

Finally, Litza shared that SHARP's impact extends beyond the students in the classroom to educators themselves through the scope and quality of the resources and programming, as well as the partnership and collaboration with teachers, administrators and the school communities. And the experiences provided to the students also fuel the educators' passions! Litza shared a proud moment when she had the opportunity to meet Donald Driver, the keynote speaker at SHARP's 2013 A Novel Event. Donald, whose foundation focuses on helping underprivileged kids, reached across the table, took Litza's hand, called her by name and said, "Thank you for what you do for our kids."

* **The Artful Thinking Project** was developed by the Harvard University Graduate School of Education in 2004 to help teachers create connections between works of art and the curriculum, and to help teachers use art as a force for developing students' thinking dispositions. The project is part of Harvard's **Project Zero** whose mission is to understand and nurture human potentials –such as learning, thinking, ethics, intelligence and creativity –in all human beings. <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/projects/artful-thinking>

“During my time with SHARP Literacy, I learned to love reading and how to get along with my classmates, even if we had different ideas about how to do projects.

I loved going on field trips to The Domes, the Art Museum and other places like that. I had a lot of fun, but I also got to try new things.

Thank you SHARP!”

- Dominick C.

Former SHARP Student (2nd grade) now 8th Grader at Blessed Sacrament

