

Reading Clinic marks 40th anniversary | McDaniel College

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It's not a typical classroom experience. Log cabin decorations deck the entrances to classrooms, called "cabins," complete with tents, campfires and plush wildlife.

Within these cabins, graduate students in McDaniel's Reading Specialist: Literacy Leadership Program work together to help elementary school children improve their reading and writing.

For 40 years, McDaniel graduate students have provided individualized instruction to local children as part of the reading clinic that has been nicknamed, "Camp McDaniel."

The children even eat camping-themed snacks, such as "dirt" and "spiders," that they create by following recipes, which helps the children practice reading to perform a task, according to Education professor Deb Miller, coordinator of the Reading Specialist program.

For four weeks this summer, 17 graduate students from Maryland and Pennsylvania worked with 58 children entering grades two through five, but Miller says the program has helped thousands of local children since its initiation by President Emerita Joan Develin Coley in 1973.

“From the beginning, the idea was to provide both a valuable service in the community that was an engaging experience for young readers and a supervised practicum for highly trained teachers who would then become certified reading specialists,” explained Coley.



The clinic is the program’s culminating practicum, in which graduate students apply the theories they have been learning to a realistic, hands-on situation, explained Miller.



Grad candidates Jaimie Shirokobrod and Lindsay Bangle.

“It’s a great opportunity for our graduate students,” said Miller, who describes the clinic as a type of service learning. “My favorite part is we’re actually helping kids.”

Grad student Kim Pfleegor said that the clinic has allowed her to implement what she has learned in her coursework, making the concepts real. She and Miller both say the most rewarding evidence in student growth is in how confident the children have become about their work.

Dan Provence, graduate student and middle school teacher, proudly described one of his students who began the class only willing to share his work through the voice of a stuffed animal. As this student's confidence increased, he eventually became excited to speak at the microphone, explained Provence.



A co-teacher in that same classroom, Stephanie Herrington, added that some of the children became more excited about their classwork when they learned they'd be able to share their work with therapy dogs from KPets.

The children shared their new skills with the dogs by reading them books, original work, and poetry. This year's theme, "literacy in our world," focuses on how everyone has special talents, including the dogs, who performed tricks for the students in return.

"We always wanted learning in the Reading Clinic to be fun because our students had

often associated reading with negative emotions; we wanted them to go home smiling every day,” said Coley.

Looking back at the past 40 years, Coley said that she consistently tried to make the clinic better than it was the year before.

“That tradition continues under new leadership,” said Coley. “It simply continues to get better and better.”



Miller highlighted new assessments, partnerships with Carroll County Public Schools, and Title 1 affiliation as some of the most recent modifications. She sees a bright outlook for the clinic and its participants. Miller anticipates that potential adjustments to the program will involve integration of reading technologies, such as tablets, into the classroom.

Learn more about the [Reading Specialist: Literacy Leadership Program](#) or [graduate studies](#) at McDaniel College.