

Training for Children's Services

Gail Terwilliger

Training is essential for all staff members so that the library's mission through established goals, objectives, and strategies can be carried out in an effective and efficient manner. Jane Gardner Conner, former Children's consultant for the South Carolina State Library, states:

"Training gives staff the skills needed to do their job well. It is an ongoing process. There are always new ideas, approaches, and topics to learn about through professional reading and continuing education opportunities such as workshops, library conventions, and classes. Various staff members, including support staff, should have the opportunity to attend meetings, rather than the head of the department always going."¹

A well-trained staff, on all levels, is a valuable public relations tool. In a tight economy, when the largest portion of a library's budget is spent on personnel, it behooves the administration to have well-trained, knowledgeable personnel who demonstrate daily to taxpayers that their dollars are wisely invested.

Each of the five headquarters children's services staff members at the Cumberland County Public and Information Center has a job description with unique responsibilities. Several duties, however, are shared by all staff: programming, reader's advisory, and reference services. These are the tasks which consume the most time and also form the foundation of our business. Since all personnel perform these tasks, training activities concentrate on them. The depth of training given each individual is determined by educational background, previous related experience, and proportion of job responsibilities. Patrons expect consistently excellent service from all employees; they make no distinction between job classifications and/or time on the job. Thus we require new employees, at all job grades, to attain a high level of competency quickly.

Training starts during the hiring process. The goal is to employ the candidate who can deliver

the highest quality of service with minimal training. The director, associate director, headquarter's librarian and myself, the department head, comprise the interview team for positions in the headquarters children's room. The questions asked during the interview process are designed to gather sufficient information to compare candidates and to assess the current and potential abilities of each one in programming, reader's advisory and reference skills, and other individual job responsibilities. The ideal candidate possesses at least minimal competency in all areas rather than extremes in abilities, therefore, a candidate who possesses a tremendous knowledge of literature but no skill in storytelling might be less attractive than one with average skills in both. Questions are asked to determine a candidate's overall abilities:

- Tell us about your experiences with youngsters eighteen months to twelve years of age and computers;
- Given a choice, would you rather present a story program one time to a group of one hundred children or four times to groups of twenty youngsters? Why?;
- Tell us any specific literary experiences you've had with children eighteen months to twelve years of age;
- Which age group would you feel most comfortable presenting programs to? Toddler, preschool, or school age?

All candidates are told in advance to come prepared to demonstrate storytelling abilities and programming talents. These questions and the demonstration indicate selection skills, knowledge of storytelling techniques, oral expression, creativity, initiative, flexibility, enthusiasm, and knowledge of child growth and development.

Reader's advisory and reference skills are tied in with questions related to literature, collection development, and censorship. Some questions asked of candidates include:

- What titles would you give an intellectually mature ten-year-girl who attends a Christian school? Her parents are religious but not fanatical. She reads eight to ten juvenile novels weekly;
- What is your philosophy of reference service to children?;
- Name three authors of books for children graduating from beginning readers to chapter books;
- A parent comes to you with a book in hand and demands that it be removed from the collection. What is

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your response?; • Do you see a difference in public versus school library goals? Elaborate; • Tell us some recent trends in children's literature; • What titles would you give an eleven-year-old boy who needs a thin book (of at least 100 pages) for a report due tomorrow?; • Name the top five reference tools you feel should be in every children's room collection. Why?

In order to give excellent reader's advisory service, an employee must be a reader. Further, we encourage staff to try to develop a love of reading in youngsters. To do this they must serve as positive role models. Questions used to determine the candidate's potential as a literary model are: • What adult book are you currently reading?; • What juvenile book?; • What was your favorite book as a child?; • What is your favorite child's book now? Throughout the interview attention is paid to the candidate's grammar. An individual in the library business must be well spoken. It is part of the total positive image which must be projected to the public. These questions and others, along with the demonstration, take about seventy-five minutes. By the time this process is completed the library has a good idea of the skill level of the chosen candidate and has made the commitment in terms of time to train him to meet expected standards.

Once hired, the next phase of training begins — Basic Orientation. It is important that the employee feel welcome and comfortable with his surroundings so that he can concentrate on learning various aspects of his job. The first few days' activities include introductions to all staff in the building; setting up his personal work space; learning the location of supplies, forms, and other materials. The employee's job description is reviewed in terms of how it fits into the work flow of the department and the system. A discussion of expectations and evaluation is essential and should take place within the first week. County performance review forms, along with those of the library system, are explained. Instruction is given on library policies and procedures concerning the microcomputers, operation of online public access catalogs, loan periods, and issuing of patron cards. The employee is given an up-to-date copy of the complete library procedures, policies, and guidelines manual to begin reading. In addition to those previously mentioned, staff read the following areas of the manual first: the Children's Programming Guidelines, the Safe Child Policy, and regulations concerning public relations requests. These are all of immediate need in order to provide accurate information to the public on frequently asked questions. In the course of the

next few weeks the entire manual is read. While a staff member may not use all procedures regularly to perform his job, knowing the scope of the manual allows him to give referrals to patrons quickly when needed.

... training is an ongoing process. The individual knows immediately that both he and the library system are in a partnership with the goal of making him a valued employee.

Often personnel in the department are asked questions about materials in the adult fiction, North Carolina State and Local History Room, and the North Carolina Foreign Language Center since these are on the same floor as children's services. Staff spend a couple of hours reviewing the scope of materials and services in these areas, at their leisure, during the first months on the job. This orientation enables children's services personnel to make suggestions to patrons. Arrangements are also made for an indepth orientation of the audiovisual department during the first four weeks, since this department is also on the same floor as children's services. Because staff members use audiovisual materials in their programs, this tour helps them learn the collection, which then facilitates program planning.

A basic knowledge of the circulation areas is helpful in order to provide the very best service. While children's services staff do not routinely perform these duties, they may need to "pitch-in" while at a branch so that patrons can be served speedily. Staff learn procedures for checking in and out materials, looking up patron records, and placing reserves. At the headquarters library, staff try to accompany patrons downstairs to the circulation area when they express specific concerns. This "personal touch" is usually remembered when patrons bring in new business, or later at the voting polls.

After the employee has been on the job approximately four weeks, he begins to make an individual performance plan for the next year. Using his job description as a guide, the employee designs measurable goals for tasks such as processing materials, reading shelves, changing displays, performing a set number of programs, reading children's materials and so forth. Figure 1

FIGURE 1

EMPLOYEE'S NAME Tom Taleteller

TITLE Librarian I

SUPERVISOR Sue Story

DATE Jan-Dec. '90

DEPT/DIV

HQ/Childrens

PERFORMANCE PLANNING

PRIORITY	WORK OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE STANDARDS (time schedule, quality, quantity, resources)	PERFORMANCE NOTES
1	Plan & conduct public programs for toddler, ps, & sa in the HQ library	30 of each age level (90 total) — Jan-Dec. '90	
2	Plan & conduct in-library visits to HQ	40 for 18 month-12 yrs. — Jan-Dec. '90	
3	Visits schools & conduct programs	21 schools/63 programs — school year 10 months	
4	Plan & conduct programs at branch locations	12 programs as assigned Jan-Dec. '90	
5	Learn new stories using oral tradition	15 stories: 5 Jan-April; 5 May-Aug; 5 Sept-Dec. '90	
6	Preview audiovisuals for programs	4 weeks prior to desired use Jan-Dec. '90	
7	Read children's materials to provide reference & reader's advisory services	2 J; 1 JNF; & 20 E per month Jan-Dec. '90	
8	Provide reference & reader's advisory services from the information desk	15 hrs. per week Jan-Dec. '90	
9	Maintain neatness & order of J NF shelves	Read entire collection every 8 days straighten shelves daily (97% accuracy) Jan-Dec. '90	
10	Process paperbacks	Within 1 week of arrival Jan-Dec. '90	
11	Discard materials	Within 1 week of being pulled from collection Jan-Dec. '90	
12	Attend workshops outside system	1 per yr. prefer reader's advisory or booktalking Jan-Dec. '90	
13	Attend storytelling festivals outside system	2 per yr. actively participate in 1 Jan-Dec. '90	
14	Visit other library systems	2 per yr. Jan-Dec. '90	
15	Attend & participate in Children's Services Council Workshops	Attend 4 per yr. make presentations at 3 Jan-Dec. '90	
16	Observe programs by other CCPL&IC staff	5 within 3 months of employment	
17	Read articles on booktalking, oral storytelling, & toddler programs	3 articles 1 on @ topic within 6 weeks of employment	
18	Familiarize self with microcomputers & discs	2 hrs. per month Jan-Dec. '90	
19	Examine all new books	Within 5 days of books coming into dept. Jan-Dec. '90	
20	Read <i>Booklist</i> , <i>SLJ</i> & other journals	Within 2 days of receiving Jan-Dec. '90	
21	Prepare & submit reports	Monthly report plus others as assigned Jan-Dec. '90	
22	SPECIAL PROJECT: Visit local hospital — present programs to children in pediatrics area	20 per yr. Jan-Dec. '90	

is an example of a plan for a Librarian I (highest level paraprofessional) in the headquarters children's services department. Note that the plan includes observation of programs conducted by all children's services personnel system-wide; visiting at least two other library systems in the state; attending a workshop; reading journal articles related to various aspects of service; and also reading children's materials. These activities stress that training is an on-going process. The individual knows immediately that both he and the library system are in a partnership with the goal of making him a valued employee. The performance plan also includes some activity or project which personally interests the employee beyond what is required. This is an important motivational tool. An employee will give more to his job if he sees that he can have fun and reap personal rewards for his efforts. During meetings to discuss the plan, specific dates and times are set for training in duties unique to the individual.

Programming is a cornerstone of children's services. Training for and evaluation of staff in this area is of paramount importance. Planning and practicing to conduct high quality programs is time-consuming, especially for the new employee with little knowledge of the collection. It can take up to fifty percent of his time to prepare three age levels of programs weekly if flannelboard stories, puppets or other props must be made; stories are presented using the oral tradition; book talks are utilized; or audiovisual materials need to be previewed. Ideally when an individual begins, he is given four to six weeks to plan and observe programs before being assigned a full schedule of regular sessions. The employee then plans a full series of programs at one time. This practice ensures theme variety and saves time to browse storytelling sources once with different topics in mind rather than going through them repeatedly. Staff are trained to utilize a variety of materials during each program so that children see the wide range of resources and activities accessible to them at the public library. This instills in children a desire to return to explore the resources further.

New employees also examine the written program plans of other staff. Together, the employee and the program creator discuss how closely the original plans follow the actual presentation in terms of selection of materials, order of use, response from children and so forth. This type of networking or mentoring works very well in training, creating a positive "team spirit" which is apparent to the public. This attitude translates into excellent service not only in programs but

reader's advisory, reference, collection development, and other skills. The entire staff is working for the good of the public.

A Behavioral Observation Scale (BOS) related to children's programming and services (See Figure 2) was designed to give employees and supervisors a common framework upon which program performance could be assessed and compared to other staff in the system. The goal is a uniformly high quality of programs throughout the system. Areas observed include selection of materials, presentation, and interaction with both children and adults. During an employee's first year in the headquarters children's department, the supervisor makes at least two observations of programs for each age level performed on a regular basis by the employee (toddler, preschool, and school age). Initial evaluation is based on close observation of the audience for their response to the staff and the presentation. If the children are attentive, the manner of presentation is generally appropriate. Periodic informal "chats" with parents, children, and teachers are a useful way to keep abreast of staff progress. Patrons will state their opinions, both positive and negative, if they feel that their comments are heard and will make an impact on service. Hopefully, each staff member will develop confidence in his abilities and find a successful style.

One or two days after the program, the observation is discussed with the employee. This gives both parties time to assess strengths and areas needing improvement. It also gives the supervisor time to think about specific training activities needed to ensure a continuation of growth. For example, if the children were unresponsive, the supervisor may suggest using more vocal variety, increasing eye contact, or using a different level of materials. If the youngsters start wiggling around, an additional fingerplay or body movement should be considered. The programmer may need to write into his performance plan a strategy in which he reads twenty picture books a week or selects and practices fingerplays at least two weeks in advance of the program in order to know them so well that eye contact with children is maintained. The employee needs to know that preparation as well as selection is necessary for an effective presentation.

Staff need the stimulation received from talking with personnel from outside of this library in order to keep a continuous flow of new ideas coming into the system. The Cumberland County Public Library and Information Center has a Children's Services Council which holds quarterly sessions to review its Programming Guidelines

FIGURE 2

**Behavioral Observation Scale
Children's Services Duties (Programming)**

1. Is friendly to patrons
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
2. Learns quickly and remembers what is taught
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
3. Willing to accept responsibilities
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
4. Maintains "cool" when the unexpected occurs
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
5. Comes up with new program ideas
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
6. Offers reader's advisory services to children
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
7. Offers reader's advisory services to adults
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
8. Selects a good variety of materials to use in the program
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
9. Keeps supervisor informed of needs and activities
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
10. Selects books/stories suitable to age group
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
11. Selects films or filmstrips suitable to the age group
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
12. Selects activities that are suitable to the age group
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
13. Orders materials, films, etc. allowing adequate time for previews & purchasing
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
14. Provides prompt, complete and accurate information to the Community Relations Coordinator
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
15. Learns stories well
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
16. Reviews materials prior to finalizing their use in a program
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
17. Arranges program area appropriately and accurately at least 30 minutes in advance of program
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
18. Tests equipment for proper working order before program
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
19. Exhibits self-confidence during program presentation (specify behavior)
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
20. Is enthusiastic about the library and shows it
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
21. Program length appropriate for the age (T: 15-20 min/PS: 30-35 min/SA: 45-50 min)
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
22. Sets out extra books and so forth for the children to browse
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
23. Alerts patrons to future events at "base" location and others
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
24. Remembers the name of "regulars" at storytimes by the end of second program
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
25. Flannelboard stories, fingerplays and songs, and traditional stories are presented without the use of notes
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
26. Discusses children's behavior out of sight and hearing of patrons
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
27. When working on a "team" presentation, communication is good between staff
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
28. Does fair share of work in "team" presentation
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
29. Manages "difficult" children in a timely and tactful manner
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
30. Manages "difficult" parents in a timely and tactful manner
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
31. Handles interruptions from other staff patrons in a timely and tactful manner
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
32. Displays an attitude of really liking children
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
33. Shows enjoyment of doing program
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
34. Does not ask children a lot of questions or drill them on the stories, etc.
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
35. Suggests better ways of doing programs/procedures/services
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
36. Is an interesting storyteller — keeps kids spellbound
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
37. Makes sure publicity about program is distributed in the library
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
38. Makes sure publicity about the program is distributed in the community
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
39. When presenting a picture book story, holds books so all can see
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
40. Stays in children's areas after program to help children and adults find things
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
41. Keeps children's shelves neat and orderly
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
42. Recommends titles and subjects for purchase on a regular basis
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
43. Does special things to make children's area inviting — displays, billboards, mobiles, etc.
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
44. Uses vocal variety and appropriate volume during presentation of program
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
45. Uses good grammar and proper pronunciation
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
46. Specific things to look for in storytelling
 - a) speed of presentation suited to story
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
 - b) pitch of voice suited to story
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
 - c) eye contact made with audience
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
 - d) gestures suited to story
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
47. Flannelboard
 - a) pieces are in order before beginning story
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
 - b) board is cleared of unnecessary pieces as story progresses
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
48. General
 - a) storyteller settles audience before starting
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
 - b) storyteller introduces story before beginning
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
 - c) storyteller is prepared to move quickly to next activity
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always
49. Addresses "regulars" by name after no more than three programs
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always

50. Uses "slack" time on desk to review appropriate materials
almost never 1 2 3 4 5 almost always

56-96	97-112	113-168	169-224	225-280
very poor	unsatisfactory	satisfactory	excellent	superior

(available as an ERIC Document) and to give staff an opportunity to share ideas gleaned from outside, workshops, readings, or personnel programming experiences. These free sessions are open to personnel from other library systems (public and school) in the state. In a tight economy it is impossible to send all staff to as many workshops as they would like to attend. Through these in-house sessions, personnel are kept informed of current trends, issues, and techniques. This helps maintain a high level of service. By inviting staff from other libraries, we keep fresh ideas coming into the system in a cost effective way. The presence of school media personnel helps to open up communication with those agencies and improve services.

Reference service is an important function of children's services. Proper training and evaluation is essential. Staff must know that the reference policy for children is no different from that for other library patrons. Service must be friendly, businesslike and competent. All questions are important whether the information is for a homework assignment or other use. Children's information requests usually fall into five types: personal reader's advisory assistance; school assignments; advice on handling personal problems; explanations about the world around them; and instruction in the use of computers and other library resources. One of the key factors in providing information service to children is the staff's approachability and willingness to hear and understand the question being asked. In addition, a knowledge of and skill in the use of materials available and the ability to guide the child to help himself is of primary importance.

Knowledge of the collection is essential for reference work. While the bulk of the shelving in the children's department is done by pages, all staff members are assigned areas to maintain. Handling materials gives the employee first hand knowledge of what is available. Often, children do not have the time to sit down in the library and work; therefore reference books are not as useful to them as ones from the circulating collection. A familiarity with heavily used resources, along with a strong knowledge of the collection, also helps the staff answer inquiries when the online catalog is down.

Initially, if possible, a new employee is put on the information desk with another staff member to observe the reference interview, methodology and tools used. All reference questions are recorded. After a few days (if the employee has not already brought the questions to the supervisor's attention) the recording sheets are collected. Each question is reviewed to see if it was answered correctly. The methodology used in the search is examined to see what resources were used and in what order. This shows whether or not the quickest, most thorough technique was used. If the answer was not found, the supervisor tries to locate it. After examining the reference sheets, the supervisor meets with the employee to discuss them. They review his strengths and point out resources which might have been overlooked. If the supervisor was able to answer a question which stumped the employee and it was in a resource that the staff used, he is assigned to examine that title more closely. If the answer was in another source unfamiliar to the employee, he spends time reviewing its scope and potential for future uses. Pairing a new staff member with an established employee helps to form the "team spirit." It is important, however, that both employees remain approachable at the desk or the patron will not feel comfortable asking questions. As the supervisor, it is important to observe, too, whether or not the employee has completed the entire reference transaction. Did he phone other branches, place a reserve, or try calling outside agencies? Has the employee asked a co-worker for assistance? If staffing is available, has the employee escorted a patron to another department? At the very least, did he phone the other department and alert it that a youngster is being sent for information assistance? All of these things indicate whether or not the employee is public service oriented and if he understands the library's role in developing lifelong library users. They send a message to the community that the library is an action organization worthy of support. And they help youngsters feel positive about themselves and the library, because building a child's self-confidence in his ability to use the resources is essential in trying to create lifelong library users.

Reader's advisory is a challenging and rewarding function of children's services — putting the right book in the hands of a youngster at the best time for that child. There are many excellent tools available such as *Children's Catalog* and *A to Zoo: Subject Access to Children's Picture Books* to help with this service. There is, however, no true substitute for reading the books themselves. The employee must have a hands-on knowledge of

titles in the collection. Most children's services staff learn the picture book collection rather quickly from planning programs and nonfiction materials from answering reference inquiries. Unfortunately, the juvenile novel is often overlooked due to the time involved in reading each title. Staying on top of what's new in the world of children's fiction by skimming chapters and thumbing through dust jackets of new arrivals helps to keep the staff current in this area.

As employees of a county agency, all library personnel must attend an orientation session conducted by Cumberland County Personnel Department. General county performance evaluation forms are discussed along with employees' rights and benefits. The public library system conducts its own orientation for new staff members every two months. Organizational charts for the county as well as the library system are reviewed. The library system's function in the community at large is presented. Staff members visit all headquarters library departments, administration, and community relations and branch facilities for a brief overview of operations. Both of the orientations provide additional insight into expectations and methods of evaluation. They provide useful information on the public library and other child advocacy groups, such as schools and social services, with which the children's services department works closely.

By the time a year has passed, the employee is well versed in programming, reference, and reader's advisory work with children and adults. Selection and collection development skills are sharpened. General knowledge of the entire library system is developed. Finally, the well trained children's services worker believes that all children are entitled to use the resources of the library and receive the same services as adults. He recognizes the importance of building a child's self confidence in and abilities to use the resources so that the youngster will become a lifelong library user. The staff member creates an exciting positive, non-threatening atmosphere. Finally, the employee is a confident, well versed public servant who gives excellent, efficient, and effective services.

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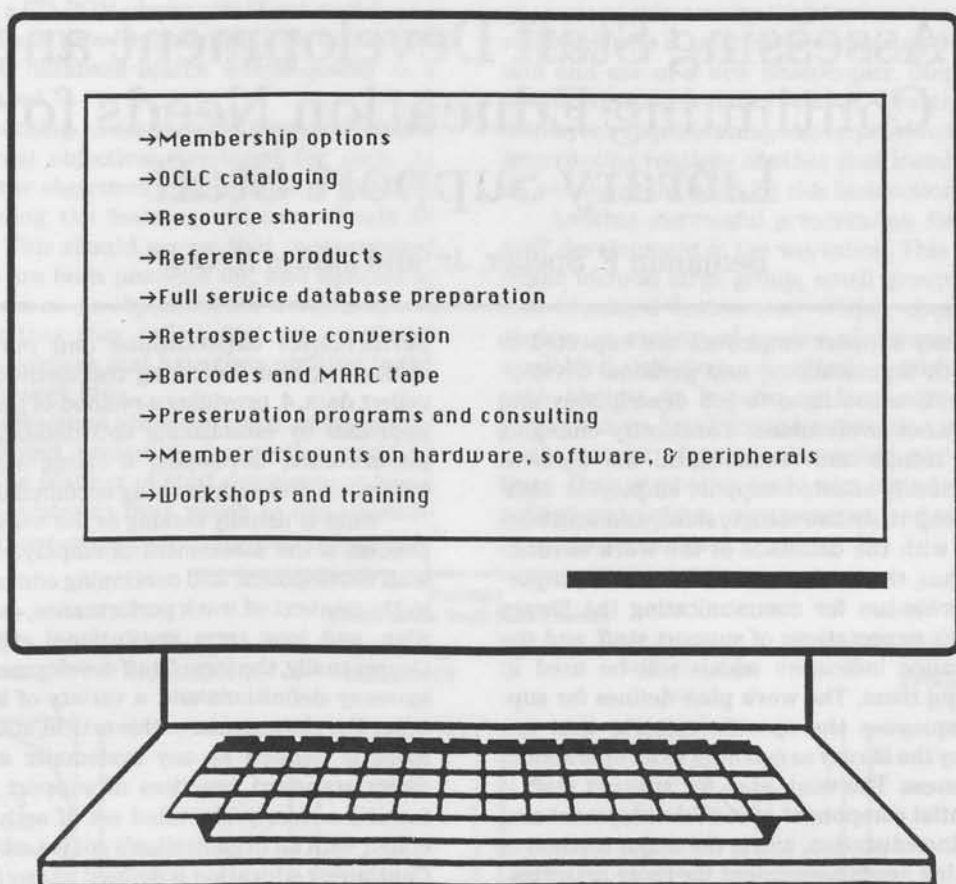
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Bob Skapura, noted author and media coordinator at Clayton Valley High School in California, conducted four sessions to standing-room-only crowds at this year's NCASL conference in High Point.

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