

Encouraging the Students to Read, Read, Read

by Kay L. Stockdale

A human mind, once stretched to a new idea, never returns to its former dimensions.
— paraphrasing Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

In this Age of Information, the school library media center and the librarian have an expanded role in the school setting. As the library has grown from one room where only books were checked in and out by hand to the hub of the school setting with electronic catalogs, circulation facilities, databases using CD-ROMs, and telecommunications for reference and correspondence purposes literally around the world, one of the main functions of the library has remained the same — helping students to improve their reading ability. Because reading is the foundation for all learning, as students read, they also broaden their horizons forever.

Seymour Sarason defines the creation of settings as “involving two or more people brought together in new relationships for a sustained period of time to achieve stated objectives.”¹ The setting can be a new setting or an old setting that is changing in some way.

The faculty and administration of

any school setting should be concerned not only about what the student learns, but also about how the student grows as a person. In *Creative Curriculum Leadership*, Dale Brubaker distinguishes between the outer curriculum and the inner curriculum. The outer curriculum is “the course of study.” The inner curriculum is “what each person experiences as learning settings are cooperatively created.”² Reading a variety of materials helps the students to develop both their outer and inner curriculum.

The overall setting of the school library media center must have an inviting atmosphere and easily located materials that not only support the educational program but also are useful to the school community. At the same time, the librarian must make sure that materials are checked out instead of “walking out,” perhaps never to be returned to the library. The librarian must also work diligently yet diplomatically to ensure that overdue materials are returned to the library media center. Hence, the librarian is contributing to the inner curriculum.

For a variety of reasons, many students are unable to function well in a large school and classroom setting. To address the needs of these students, alternative school settings are created. In the Asheville City Schools System, the Accelerated Learning Center (ALC)

was created in 1993 as an intervention middle school for students who, according to their scores on certain tests, indicate that they have the ability to achieve at grade level but for a variety of reasons are functioning below grade level. According to its mission statement, the ALC “is committed to providing a climate that accelerates academic achievement and fosters maximum personal growth for the development of productive citizens in a competitive, multicultural society.”³

The ALC uses the North Carolina Standard Course of Study as the basis for its outer curriculum. In continuing to add print and non-print materials to the library to support the outer and inner curriculum needs of the community of this intervention middle school, it is important to establish a good working relationship with the principal and the teachers. Knowing the students is also important in order to know their needs, in terms of both the curriculum and leisure reading. Of equal importance is to know the current library collection so that it can be utilized effectively within the school setting and developed appropriately.

In a small school, funds often are not adequate to develop the size library that is needed. This fact is surely true at the ALC. To increase the selection of books available to the students, the librarian suggested making arrangements for the bookmobile to stop monthly at the ALC. The principal, the teachers, and the bookmobile librarian supported this

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idea enthusiastically. The librarian worked with the teachers and the public library system to make arrangements for the students to have the opportunity to obtain their own library cards. As the librarian explained the new program to the students, she informed them that they could use their library card at any of the nine libraries in the city-county library system as well as on the bookmobile when it comes to their communities, especially in the summer. The librarian emphasized that this card allows them to have access to all the materials in the library system. This card enables them to be a life-long learner if they use it to check out and read the materials in the library. Approximately seventy percent of the student body applied for and received a library card. During the awards portion of the graduation ceremony, these students were recognized and received a bookmark with a message from the librarian to encourage their continued use of the bookmobile during the summer months.

Students in an intervention program are often behind in their reading. A second approach the librarian took this past year to help get the students more interested in reading was to invite Dori Sanders, an African American author from York, South Carolina, to visit and speak to the students. The Pride Committee of the Asheville City Schools provided an honorarium for her. In preparation for her visit, some of the students read her novels *Clover* and *In Her Place*. To insure that all of the students were familiar with her writings, the sixth and seventh grade language arts teacher read the book *Clover* to them in class. The librarian read selections from *In Her Place* to the various eighth grade classes. The students also prepared questions to ask Sanders when she came. She spoke twice, once to the eighth graders and then to the sixth and seventh graders. The students were most attentive and asked a variety of pertinent questions. Three of the students were interviewed by the local TV newswoman for the news segment entitled "Never Stop Learning." This approach is similar to the approach discussed by Dolores Maminski in her article "Up Close and

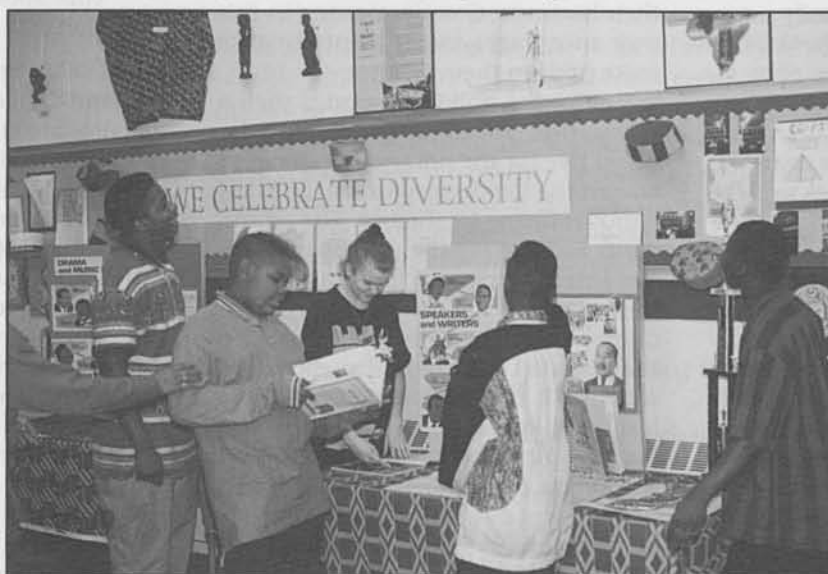
Personal."⁴ Sanders spoke of how her father, a school principal, had always kept a journal, how much it meant to her and her family after their homeplace burned, and how she, too, kept a journal. Several classes began keeping journals after Sanders's visit.

A third approach, and perhaps the old stand-by, in helping the students to improve their reading is to help them select an appropriate book when they come to the library either individually or as a class. The motto of school librarians is "The right book in the hands of the right student at the right time." And it works!

A fourth approach the librarian uses to encourage interest in reading involves having the students participate in a survey of the periodicals the library media center receives. Since periodicals consume a large portion of the library budget, the librarian thought it important to

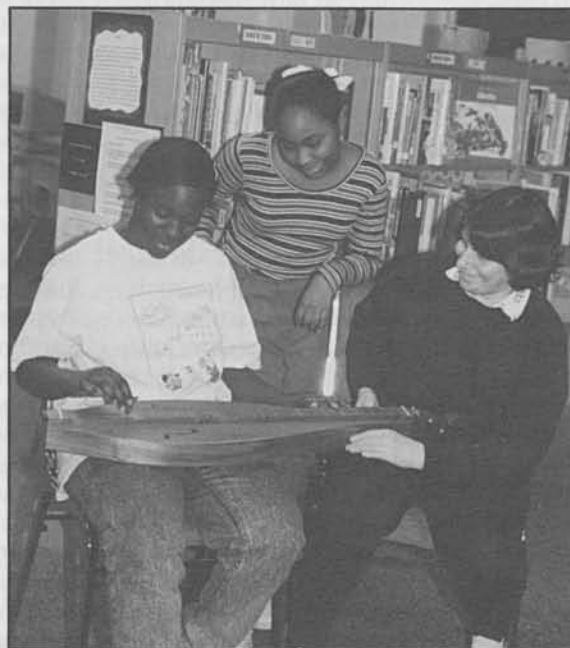
ing grade level. By reading books and answering correctly the computerized questions pertaining to the book, students earn points. Prizes also have a point value. When students have accumulated a certain number of points, they can "cash in" their points and choose their prizes. Likewise, a student may decide initially which prize he or she would like to have and read books to earn the number of points needed for that particular prize. Thus, students often choose books of a higher reading level in order to earn points faster. Prizes can be obtained from various businesses, partners in education, teachers, and other donors. Since the initial start up cost for *The Accelerated Reader* is more than school library media center budgets can absorb, finding outside funding for this program is essential. To secure funding for the program, the librarian chose the collaborative approach by applying for a grant from the Asheville City Schools Foundation, Inc. for the software, a matching grant from the school's business partner for purchasing books, and also allocate a portion of the library/media center budget for additional books included in *The Accelerated Reader* program.

This year for the first time in the three-year history of the ALC, the library is holding a book fair. The art students made posters for each of the classroom doors as



provide the students with the opportunity to help evaluate the collection. They responded well to the survey. The faculty evaluated the professional journals. Based on the survey responses, the library committee cancelled five subscriptions. The funds saved here will be used in other areas of the library acquisition budget.

During the 1994-95 school year, with the support of the principal and several teachers, the librarian began researching *The Accelerated Reader* program. *The Accelerated Reader* is based upon the concept of rewarding students for reading. Books are given points according to their read-



well as individual bookmarks. The librarian went to each classroom to inform the students of the book fair. Students recorded the book fair dates in their assignment books and received two flyers, or, if they did not have their assignment books but wrote the dates in their composition books, they received one flyer. In this case, bringing their assignment books to class addresses students' inner and outer curriculum. In discussing the book fair, the librarian suggested that they might like to begin their own personal library with a paperback dictionary, thesaurus, world almanac, and *Guinness Book of World Records*. The students added other titles and asked if particular books were available. The librarian then explained that arrangements had been made with the company to try to get books of interest if they were not already available. The librarian reminded the students that they could give themselves as well as family members and friends the gift of books. Co-chairs for each class volunteered to return the flyers with the students' requests on them to the librarian who would pass them along to the company representative. During the book sale, the class co-chairs also helped when their class came to the library to purchase their books and gifts.

As important as books are, the printed word is no longer the only source of information and reading in a library. Computers have changed greatly the way information is stored and retrieved, as well as the way we communicate with others. The CD-ROM can store a vast amount of material on a small disc that is accessed through a computer. When the classes come to the library to learn to use this electronic finding aid, the librarian uses the following method to teach them how to search their topic using *Compton's Encyclopedia* on CD-ROM. The students know the topic they need to look up. They count off so they know their order in using the CD-ROM. The librarian teaches the first student to look up his or her topic on the CD-ROM. After that student completes his search and prints the needed information, the student moves to the adjacent chair and becomes the "teacher." The next student comes to the student chair and follows the instructions of the "teacher." If the students run into a problem, the librarian is there to help. The rotation continues until all the students finish researching their topics. Because the students are actively involved in the teaching/learning process, they are far more attentive and remain "on task" a greater portion

of the time.

Communicating with others via e-mail has also added a new dimension to the curriculum. With e-mail, students can communicate with other students nearby, in another state, or on another continent. The topics of communication vary from a single topic to an interdisciplinary approach. Because of the intricacies of e-mail, students save their correspondence to their individual disks, as well as print a copy that is placed in their portfolios. The teacher or librarian transfers the individual out-going communications to a common disk to allow them to be transmitted via e-mail. When the responses are received, they are printed so that students have their own copies to work with and keep in their portfolios. Adding this dimension to the students' educational experience helps them to realize the importance of learning to use the computer and how its use broadens their horizons. Communicating in this way encourages the students to take more pride in their writing.

Since the holiday season is such a special time, the librarian secured a donated tree for the library. The librarian and art teacher decided to use the international theme for the tree. The art students and the math classes made various international decorations for the tree. This year the theme is an ecological tree in keeping with the ecology club that was recently established at the school. All the students are invited to bring something related to nature — a feather, pine cones, nuts, ribbons, a decoration they create, or a holiday picture they cut out that brings in the recycling theme. This year the students will enjoy hot apple cider when their classes come in to add their decorations to the tree. Again, the outer and inner curriculum are addressed.

These methods encourage some of the students to read more and expand their horizons. However, since many of the students need additional help and the encouragement of a caring person just for them, the librarian contacted the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. The chair of the group volunteering to help the public schools contacted the education department and helped to arrange for twelve education students to tutor some of the ALC students. Members from area churches in the community are also volunteering.

These methods of incorporating the library media center into the ALC's outer curriculum and the students' inner cur-

riculum involve collaborative planning by the administration, the faculty, and the librarian. This planning is an on-going process and takes place both formally and informally. As Jane Bandy Smith states, a middle school librarian "should be able to identify the connectors between student needs, the school program features designed to address those needs, and the library media services that respond to those needs."⁵ As stated in *Information Power*,

library media specialists provide the necessary human link between a well-developed library media program and the users served by the program. As such, they translate the goals presented in the mission statement into vibrant, inspiring learning experiences. Library media specialists bring to the school community expert knowledge about the world of information and ideas in all their forms.⁶

The librarian understands the school setting and creates a library setting that supports and enhances the larger school environment. By being an integral part of the instructional team of the school, the librarian contributes in significant ways to both the outer, more formal, curriculum and the inner curriculum that each person in the school setting experiences throughout the school year. By doing so, we hope each student can continue to develop to his or her fullest potential and truly become a lifelong reader and learner.

References

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- ³ Asheville City Schools, *Accelerated Learning Center Program Booklet Grades 6, 7, 8, 1995-1996* (Asheville, NC: Author, 1995-1996), 1.
- ⁴ Delores Maminski, "Up Close and Personal: Middle School Students Read and Meet Young Adult Authors," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 68:11 (September, 1993): 35-39.
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- ⁶ American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, *Information Power: Guidelines For School Library Media Programs* (Chicago and Washington, DC: ALA/AECT, 1988), 24.