

# Creating International



*School library media specialist Laura Crafton shows SEK English language teachers library crafts for preschoolers.*



# Library Classrooms

BY BOB SKIPPER



*Cynthia Houston and Roxanne Spencer*

**TWO LIBRARY MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCHERS AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HAVE DEvised A HYBRID OF A TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM AND A SCHOOL LIBRARY SETTING TO HELP WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN A P-12 SCHOOL IN SPAIN.**



The WKU faculty members involved in this exchange project are Cynthia Houston, assistant professor in the Department of Special Instructional Programs, and Roxanne Spencer, assistant professor and coordinator of the Educational Resources Center, University Libraries. Dr. Houston and Ms. Spencer developed the library classroom proposal for Colegios San Estanislao de Kostka (better known as SEK) Catalunya, a private, primary

through twelfth grade school of about 1,500 students, located in La Garriga, Spain, near Barcelona.

The two WKU researchers became involved at the request of the SEK Catalunya English program consultant, Mariela Gomez, who is also a student in the WKU-University of Louisville Cooperative Doctoral Program in Educational Administration and Organizational Development.

“Mariela Gomez and her family live near Barcelona and her children attend the SEK Catalunya,” Ms. Spencer said. “She was concerned about the way English language instruction was being taught at the school.”

Houston and Spencer visited Spain in May 2005, with support from a grant from the WKU Provost's Initiative for Excellence and the Department of Special Instructional Programs, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences. Through visiting the SEK campus, local schools, and public libraries, they developed their idea for a library classroom. "We wanted to develop a collaboration or research project where we could help the school create library classrooms, with children's books in English, to support language instruction in the primary grades," Spencer said.

SEK Catalunya is working toward a different paradigm of education, notes Houston. "They're trying to move their teachers and parents toward the idea of a more resource-based education instead of a rote textbook orientation to education," she said. "Here in Kentucky, we've had ten years of education reform where we have been exploring and implementing that very idea. When you

have that model of education, libraries become essential, because the students are learning independently, and the teachers are helping the students select and use resources."

Under this model, information also comes from resources other than teachers and textbooks, Dr. Houston explained, adding that research has shown that in an English as a foreign language curriculum, a literature-rich environment creates more interac-

Butler County [Kentucky] school district. Ms. Crafton is also a part-time instructor of the undergraduate children's literature course in the Library Media Education program at WKU. This second research trip was also supported by a Provost's Initiative for Excellence grant. "We had a bit more intensive experience, because at that point the pilot project was off the ground. From the initial caution and wariness on the part of the

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tion between the students and the language, increasing their interest and motivation to learn.

The final proposal was for the SEK to create English Language Arts Library Classrooms (ELALC) for the pre-school and primary grades. The proposal described a classroom setting that integrated language arts and library skills instruction for students to become engaged in a resource-rich English language environment.

The ELALC project includes an exchange between WKU faculty and qualified students and SEK Catalunya English teachers. In July 2005, two English language teachers from the SEK primary program attended a training workshop in school librarianship at WKU. "We gave them a very intensive workshop in library skills, collection management, and collection development," Ms. Spencer said. In Fall 2005, a graduate student spent two weeks at SEK Catalunya as part of the required library media education practicum, helping teachers and students implement the ELALC project in primary grades one and two.

In May 2006, Ms. Spencer returned to Spain with a school library media specialist, Laura Crafton, from the

school administration there, we saw dramatic change," Ms. Spencer said. "The program was piquing interest. It was getting results. The school administrators and the teachers who were implementing the program were excited about it."

The SEK-WKU exchange continued in July 2006 when two pre-school teachers from the SEK came to WKU for the library administration and collection management workshop. The teachers studied the basics of collection development, library administration, and classroom activities, and worked with Ms. Crafton at Morgantown Elementary School to see how American school libraries are run.

There were some problems shipping materials to Spain because of the expense and restrictions brought on by tariff concerns. "But despite some slowdowns, things were really starting to work," Ms. Spencer said. Mariela Gomez was pleased with the kinds of materials that they were recommending, and the materials were supporting the language instruction program, "so it was building on the initial idea successfully. The parents were seeing results, and the kids were enjoying it as well," Spencer noted.



*WKU LME graduate student helps out at SEK.*



“Preliminary indications are that the administrators are going to take this approach to English language instruction to the other SEK schools in Spain,” Spencer said, “which could create additional opportunities for WKU to continue an exchange with the SEK.” This would give WKU faculty and students the benefit of international experience.

“I think the program has a lot of potential for growth,” Ms. Spencer said. “It emphasizes literacy and a love of reading, and combines language instruction and the support of the library. I like the fact that these three components are working together to support instruction.”

The project has also meant a new area of research and writing for Dr. Houston and Ms. Spencer. “We have found that we are enriching the scholarship in this country by working in another country,” Dr. Houston noted. “There’s an interest in this research and in this project because we’re bringing some of our pedagogy and our experiences and our research to a place that has not viewed language instruction or library skills in the same way. The exchange is also influencing us in that we are improving our ability to globalize our curriculum by working with international resources.”

Their work has received international recognition. Ms. Spencer recently

received a Highly Commended Paper Award from the Emerald Literati Network for her journal article in *Collection Building* titled “Developing library classroom children’s collections in English for a Catalunan private school.” Dr. Houston has an article in press with the International Federation of Libraries and Institutions’ *IFLA Journal*, “Building capacity for global education in school library media education through international exchange.” Another article, where Houston and Spencer discuss the values and effects of international collaboration on teacher education using the SEK Catalunya project as an example, was published in Spring 2007 in the international journal, *Library Review*.

“We’re very much in an applied field. We’re very much in a professional field, so some people question what we’re doing as research,” Dr. Houston said. “Because we’re working in the Spanish language, we know we’re going to be able to directly apply what we’re learning here to Kentucky, which is experiencing an incredible increase in Spanish-speaking students. I think it has made us more sensitive to the needs and interests of different educational systems. We are fortunate to have a wide variety of international students here at Western and this experience has put us more in tune with that.” ■



## At each grade level, there are differences in objectives and implementation of the ELALCs:

At the pre-school level:

- A mobile library classroom introduces a respect for and interest in books. The initial collection is in English, with age-appropriate story time books and audiovisual media. These encourage students to appreciate books and the worlds of knowledge and entertainment they contain.

For the primary grades:

- Use authentic whole language instruction and introduce library skills and activities in a library classroom setting to increase primary students’ English comprehension, listening, and speaking skills.
- Focus on developing vocabulary and English-language speaking and reading experiences. Story time is used to support linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social, and cultural elements of English-language learning. The progression is from basic library skills through developing reading, writing, and speaking abilities.
- By grades four through six, students engage in more advanced English language learning activities. These are enhanced by increased independent reading using the library classroom, individual and cooperative group language arts activities, and problem-based learning projects.

