



The Book Keepers

How four dynamic teachers-turned-librarians are making waves with world-class libraries in their public schools.

BY MARGE MACASAET-BARRO

Over and over, researchers tell us that having good libraries leads to improved reading skills and-increased student success in school. Unfortunately, most public elementary schools in the Philippines lack the resources to provide this for their students and teachers. In many schools today, libraries mean dark and padlocked rooms with a scattering of old tables and chairs, and dusty shelves filled with old textbooks that are no longer used.

READISCOVERY

Four schools in Metro Manila are defying convention and now boast of colorful, kid-friendly learning havens where students can freely go to read fairy tales, listen to storytelling sessions, watch films, use the computer, and play with educational toys. Welcome to the READiscovery Center—a joint project of Sa Aklat Sisikat Foundation (SAS) and Hongkong Shanghai

Banking Corporation (HSBC) that aims to equip specially-selected public elementary schools with a world-class multi-media knowledge center. READiscovery Centers are places where students, teachers, parents and community members can read, learn and expand their horizons.

Along with the physical structure as well as thousands of local and foreign books, toys, games and electronic equipment, SAS and HSBC also provided training for one teacher in each public school to prepare her for the role of READiscovery Center Coordinator; that is: a cheerful, full-time, fully-prepared, ever-ready-with-a-story school librarian. Four carefully-chosen teachers were then sent to International School Manila and Xavier School to undergo training to equip them with library management skills. There were seminars, exposure trips, book talks, and on-the-job training, all the while being mentored by experts in library science.

TALK ABOUT TRAINING!

Margie de la Cruz of Libis Elementary School sums up the training period as “Fun, fun, fun! I learned so many different strategies, methods and techniques that can be used to encourage more reading enthusiasts.”

Meanwhile, Malou Zerrudo of Alabang Elementary School says: “I’ve certainly become a much better person since then. The training I went through required 110% (or more!) commitment, participation and focus. When my principal pulled me out from my Grade 2 class to make me attend the training, little did I know then that there was no turning back!”

Today, the four pioneering READiscovery Center Coordinators are in a class all their own.

A NEW AND EXCITING JOB

“Everyday at the READiscovery Center is always a new beginning. My work as READiscovery Coordinator is much

PHOTO BY JO AVILA SHOT ON LOCATION AT THE ALABANG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READISCOVERY CENTER

more complicated than when I was a regular teacher. It's a more serious and tougher responsibility," shares Malou. She now has even more responsibility, having been elected president of the Muntinlupa Librarians' Association after her training.

"Aside from teaching library classes to orient all students on the proper use of the center, we have to make sure that everything is in its proper place so that students will not find it difficult to locate whatever they need," adds Margie. "We always make sure the students enjoy the Center. I also supervise those who are studying or playing educational games."

Lyneve de Guzman of Kalawaan Elementary School in Pasig starts her day as READiscovery Center Coordinator "by making the center a clean, mess-free environment conducive to fun learning. Part of my responsibility is to conduct storytelling sessions, provide creative library activities and engage teachers and students to make full use of the facilities. I end my library classes by introducing a storybook that the students might find interesting."

"Operating a READiscovery Center is a dream come true," confesses Amy Manuit of Marcella Agoncillo Elementary School in Binondo, Manila. "I've always wished for a state-of-the-art resource center where students can fall in love with books and develop the reading habit and at the same time be exposed to technology."

LIBRARIANS SHARE TIPS

Start the reading habit in yourself. "You can not promote the love and habit of reading to others if you yourself are not a reader" —*Margie de la Cruz*

Be sensitive to the needs of your students. "Every time they come and visit, I see so much hunger for knowledge in their eyes. These children had not been privileged enough to access so many books, toys and games all under one roof before. At the READiscovery Center, the welfare of my pupils is the highest law. —*Lyneve de Guzman*

Engage parents and other family members. "Our Grade 1 pupils are usually accompanied by their parents or elder siblings, who eventually end up reading themselves while waiting in the library. What a neat way to get the entire family into the reading habit!" —*Malou Zerrudo*

Share with other schools. "We have helped improve the libraries of other public schools like the A. Maceda Elementary School in the City of Manila and the Queen's Row Elementary School at Bacoor, Cavite." —*Amy Manuit*

Because managing the center is so demanding, the Coordinators also get faculty members, parents and students to pitch in. "Pupils are assigned to our 'Baggage Counter' where the kids leave their bags before entering the library. Other students watch shoes, which the READiscovery Center users also need to leave outside," says Malou. Teacher volunteers assist the students in checking out their books.

COUNTING BLESSINGS

After almost a year of operating their very own READiscovery Centers, the four READiscovery Coordinators still cannot believe the fortune their schools have received. Malou recalls the very first day her READiscovery Center opened up its doors:

"I couldn't believe the loooong line of eager and excited students

waiting to enter the READiscovery Center. It was like the line for a Harry Potter movie!" These long lines haven't let up, and are among most difficult and challenging things in her daily routine. "But am glad to note that indeed, these students have developed their love and habit of reading!" ★

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Marge Macasaet-Barro is the former Executive Director of the Sa Aklat Sisikat Foundation. She has chosen to give up this post in favor of spending more time as a mother to her three young kids, especially her 5-year-old dyslexic son. She is a certified educational therapist from the US-based National Institute of Learning Disabilities.

LIBRARY FACELIFT



Even libraries can look unattractive, boring, and in total need of a makeover. M. Agoncillo's library shelves used to house old, uninteresting books and encyclopedias.



With the help of SAS and HSBC, M. Agoncillo's students now enjoy a bright and modern space for reading and learning. READiscovery Center Coordinator Amy Manuit says that it's a dream come true!

SAS-HSBC READiscovery Center Fast Facts

- Started in 2003 with four pioneering public elementary schools: Alabang Elementary in Muntinlupa; Kalawaan Elementary in Pasig; Libis Elementary in Quezon City; and M. Agoncillo Elementary in Binondo, Manila
- Over 20,000 books donated
- Over 12,500 public elementary students served
- Plans are in the pipeline for constructing four more READiscovery Centers in other NCR schools

For more information, please contact: For more information, please contact:
Sa Aklat Sisikat Foundation Inc.
Telefax (632) 8898135 or 8863888 loc. 3523 or 3525
Email sas@readerstransform.com