Sherman Center Update  
by Melissa Bailey

The Sherman Center just completed its first full year, and is moving at a rapid pace! We have officially moved into our newly renovated space in UMBC’s Fine Arts Building, Suite 017. Nearby, in the Albin O’Kuhin Library, the Center hosted its first annual spring professional development (PD) for early childhood educators (pre-K-2) at our four partner schools - Bay-Brook, Curtis Bay, Lakeland, and Maree G. Farring. The teacher-led PD, held May 1, focused on Baltimore City Public Schools’ new Wit & Wisdom curriculum and diverse books in early childhood classrooms. Guest speakers included: Ashley Cook, Director of Literacy, Language & Culture at Baltimore City Public Schools; Victoria Goddard-Truitt, Kindergarten teacher at Bay-Brook; Leslie Adams, 1st grade teacher at Curtis Bay; Kelsey Kodak, 1st grade teacher at Maree G. Farring; and Sara Lakarosky, 2nd grade teacher at Lakeland. Each teacher was recommended by school leaders and presented on instructional strategies for Wit & Wisdom. Our last guest speaker, Olivia Grimes, a Sherman STEM Teacher Scholar and Sherman Center student intern, presented on using the book, Du Iz Tak?, from our diverse books collection for an integrated English Language Arts/science lesson. The Sherman Center also completed the first academic year of its Literacy Fellows Program. Program fellows and volunteers have helped to plant seeds of learning through their student-focused literacy activities in reading, writing, and vocabulary. Over 230 hours of volunteer service was provided at Bay Brook and 270 hours at Curtis Bay during the 2018-19 school year. The Sherman Center also launched a new literacy program for the families of children 0-3, but more about that in the fall issue!

Featured Article: Building Literacy Proficiency and Family Engagement at M.G. Farring Elementary/Middle School  
by Kindel Nash, PhD, Associate Professor of Education, Joshua Michael, MSED, Doctoral Student, School of Public Policy, and Kristina Ackerman, Doctoral Student, Language, Literacy & Culture, UMBC

When young children receive high quality literacy instruction, their lives improve. Effective literacy instruction is associated with improved lifelong health, increased educational attainment, and higher economic opportunity1. Literacy proficiency is a gateway to higher level science, technology, engineering, and mathematics learning, leads to advancement within professional fields, and is vital for effective citizenship in a democratic society2. In addition to teachers, families play a critical role in young children’s literacy development3. However, prevalent reading interventions and top-down approaches to family engagement often disempower families and communities and disconnect them from schools.

Flipping this paradigm, we used a grant from the Sherman Center to implement and evaluate a research-based reading strategy, Read Two Impress (R2I)4, at Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle School. R2I follows the steps of the Neurological Impress Method, an intervention for students who read two or more years below grade level, where a tutor, seated on a student’s dominant side, reads aloud a slightly challenging text expressively and slightly faster than the student while guiding the student’s finger to track the text. This study of the effects of R2I was unique in that it included families; culturally diverse books, which have been linked to higher student comprehension and engagement; and was conducted in an urban school.

During five training sessions and twelve weeks of regular practice, we shared the R2I strategy with second grade students, who were struggling readers, and their families. We collected family interview and student achievement data to measure the effects of the intervention. Four key findings emerged:

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• R2I increased bonding and positive interactions between participating students and family members

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• Participating students and families gained confidence as readers
• Bilingual families and students experienced improved fluency from the use of culturally diverse and bilingual books

These positive results suggest that R2I can be modified with the use of culturally diverse books to provide families in urban schools with a research-based strategy to build their children's reading confidence and literacy skills, even if they have struggled with reading in the past.

Research Notes
Improving Outcomes for Underserved Populations: An Examination of the Literacy Fellows Program

All students deserve to experience optimal educational opportunities for academic success throughout their formal schooling. As part of UMBC’s commitment to this goal, the Sherman and Shriver Centers have implemented, for the first time this past academic year (2018-19), the Literacy Fellows Program. The program utilizes student volunteers from the UMBC community to assist early childhood classroom teachers with reading instruction. The goal is to improve young children’s reading experiences and outcomes. Our multi-year study, which will begin in the 2019-2020 school year in two Sherman Center partner schools - Bay Brook and Curtis Bay, will seek to answer four questions. Specifically: (1) How is the Literacy Fellows Program implemented? (2) What challenges to implementation do the various stakeholders face? (3) What are the literacy and literacy-related outcomes for children who participated in the Literacy Fellows Program? (4) Are the potential benefits from the Literacy Fellows Program comparable across different groups of children (e.g., English learners, children who start school “not ready”)?

Research to Practice

In the one-minute video clips below, 1st grade teacher, Sarah English (bottom left), and 2nd grade teacher, Sara Lakarosky (bottom right), both at Lakeland Elementary/Middle School, share how they used books from the diverse books collection to engage their students. Ms. English describes how she used Du Iz Tak? and Red: A Crayon’s Story to promote classroom conversations about important topics, including respect for differences among individuals and cultures.

Ms. Lakarosky used Separate is Never Equal and Green is a Chile Pepper to make cultural connections for her students, generally, and English Learners, specifically. To learn more about the Sherman Center’s Diverse Books Project and view other teacher videos, please visit our web site.