

Top Ten Things Baby Teachers Should Know about School Libraries

“Head for the Edge,” April/May 2003

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Dear First Year Teacher,

Welcome to school. Is it ever nice to see your fresh, smiling face! I hope some of your eagerness and enthusiasm rubs off on the rest of us who have been here awhile. (A couple of us still yearn for the days of the one room school.)

I am the school media specialist, or librarian, if you prefer. I answer to both. I recognize that your teacher preparation may not have given you much information about or experience with working with me or using our library's resources effectively. There is also a pretty good chance that the school library you used during your own school days was different from our program here.

To help get things off on a positive spin, here are a few things I'd like you to know about the library, our program and me that can help us both form a great partnership.

1. The librarian doesn't own the library. You and your students do. You can recommend materials and have a voice in library policy making. Volunteer to become a member of our school's library advisory committee.
2. The library should be considered an "intellectual gymnasium." It's not a student lounge, study hall or baby-sitting service. The students in the library, including the ones you send, should have a reason for being there. Whether for academic purposes or personal use, students should be in the library because they need the library's resources, not just because they need to be somewhere.
3. The best resource in the library is the librarian. I can help you plan a project, solve a technology problem, find professional research, give insight into an ethical problem, or answer a reference question. And if I can't do it, I will help you find someone who can. I can help find interlibrary loan materials you need that are not in the school library itself. Helping others gives me a huge sense of satisfaction so please never hesitate to ask me.
4. Planning is a good thing. Advanced planning with me will greatly increase your and your students' chances for success with projects that require information resources. A well-planned research unit or technology project will greatly decrease frustrations for everyone involved. With my experience, I can let you know what strategies work and don't work.
5. Recognize that the library provides access to both print and electronic information. I can determine which one best suits your and your students' needs. Students do not always realize that print resources are the best for many purposes. It breaks my heart to watch a student spend a frustrating hour trying to find the answer to a question on the Internet that could have been answered with a print resource in minutes.

6. The librarian can be helpful in evaluating the information found on the Internet. One of the greatest challenges of using the Internet is determining whether the facts and opinions found there are credible. I have the training and tools to do just that. And it is my mission to teach students effective evaluation skills as well.
7. The librarian can help create assessments for your students' projects. The findings of research projects presented in electronic form, conclusions drawn from primary resources, and research that calls for higher-level thinking to be demonstrated all call for good authentic assessment tools rather than a simple gut-reaction comments or an objective test. I can help you find examples of these sorts of tools as well as help you create and administer them yourself. Let's work together to make your students' learning experiences as meaningful as possible.
8. The librarian can be your technology support center. I'm no technical guru, but I can help you and your students with technology applications. Need to use a scanner or digital camera? I can show you how. Need to create a multimedia presentation? Let me give you a quick lesson. Looking for effective ways to search the web? Ask me. I'm not a technician, but I can sometimes help locate that kind of help for you as well.
9. The library can help your students' performance on standardized reading tests. Research has proven that children become more adept at reading by extensively practicing reading at or just below grade level. The library contains a wide range of material in print format that students can use to improve reading skills. And I can help match just the right book or magazine with just the right reader. If you need a book talk for your class or help with a student struggling to find something of interest, just say so.
10. The librarian will be your partner when trying new things. It's been said that some teachers during their career teach one year, thirty times. Can you imagine how long those thirty years must have seemed? If you need somebody to share the glory or the shame of a new unit, activity, or methodology, I'm the one.

I hope your next thirty years will be exciting and gratifying. You'll be influencing the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of kids in incredibly positive ways.

The subtitle of my professional standards document is *Building Partnerships for Learning*. I have truly taken that concept to heart. I am here to help you and your students do things you can't do alone.

Again, welcome,

Your library media specialist