5

REACHING YOUR STUDENTS

No matter what you consider the challenges of your job, your first thoughts should always be about your students. They are the reason you are there. Unless you show them how important you consider their success, make friends with them, and let them know you are available if problems arise, you will not be fulfilling your mission.

Laying the Groundwork

"Fake it till you make it" does not work when building relationships. You have to mean it. As you begin your career you will see good and bad teachers. Notice how teachers who truly care about their students are more successful. From the very first, you need to show students you value them as people—whether they are in kindergarten or high school. Being friendly—which is different from being their friend, connecting with them personally, and developing a climate of mutual respect forms the foundation from which everything else follows.

Start with a Smile

The simplest way to make a connection is to smile. It will go a long way to putting both you and students at ease. For the ones just starting or new to a school, those first days are scary. A friendly face is a comforting sight, making them feel safe and encouraging them to get to know you better. Even at the upper grades, students respond easily to that silent greeting.

Ask about their summer and be ready to share some details of yours. Talk about any books they read and enjoyed, and suggest any related titles you know. The dialogue is a natural one and opens communication that will deepen over time. Keep in mind that your goal is for them to always see you as a source of nonjudgmental help.

Keep that smile going as the year progresses. While a welcoming face is easy to present on the first day or week of school, weariness sets in over time. With daily pressures or worrisome details on your mind, it is sometimes easy to forget that students are your first priority. Even more than adults, they will reflect the attitude you bring to them. Smile and show them you are glad to see them, no matter what else is happening.

The Power of Names

Build on that opening connection by showing students that they are your main focus. One way to demonstrate that you care about each one is to learn their names so that you can greet them in the hall (be sure to always look pleasant as you

walk down the corridors, regardless of what problems you may be juggling) or as they drop by to return a book or ask for assistance. This task is somewhat easier for those elementary-level SLs with fixed schedules who have class lists, but even if you are at a middle or high school, you should do your best to know students' names.

Although this can't be accomplished overnight, a good way to begin is to try to have short conversations with individuals and train your memory to recall something about each one to connect to their names. Many principals recognize the importance of this connection. If they are able to greet each student personally, so can you.

It is difficult, with all the other things you must do, to try to remember hundreds of identities, but that is a key to building relationships, and everyone will be very pleased that you have taken the trouble to know them. At the high school, this is vital because your students will be much more responsive once they see that you look on them as individuals and not just as one of a group. At the same time, they will show you their regard and look on you quite differently.

Again, do not fake it. If you forget a student's name admit it. Tell them you are working hard on remembering everyone but you need their help. Letting them know you are not "perfect" and have to struggle to master something you find difficult makes you more real and serves as a role model for them to develop perseverance.

Building Respect

One of the keys to successful interactions with students is to create a climate of mutual respect. You must give it in order to get it. Friendliness, courtesy, and consideration set a tone that brings large returns.

Those magical words from kindergarten—"please" and "thank you"—should consistently be present when you speak with students. As you help them or ask a question, pretend you are addressing a faculty member. The same courtesy you give to adults must be inherent in your dealings with students. You will know you are successful when you hear them use those words when speaking with you.

Be prepared to apologize. You might accidentally blame the wrong student or overreact because you are having a bad day. Acknowledge your mistake. Having adults say they are sorry teaches students that anyone can make an error, but it is important to own up to the responsibility for it.

If you do not have a plan for handling interruptions by staff members, you are likely to cut off the student with a few short words and turn to the adult. The message is quite clear as to which person is your priority. At a minimum, the courteous behavior is to excuse yourself, but you should go much further.

Tell the teacher or administrator that you will be back in a moment. Bring the conversation with the student to some sort of completion by giving a few directions as to how to proceed, indicating what to do in case a problem emerges, and saying when you will get back to the discussion. Have the student check in with you before leaving—even if you are still speaking with the adult.

Once you learn what the staff member wants, you will have a good idea of how much time it will take. If it requires a number of minutes, excuse yourself so that you can tell the student approximately when you will return. Your actions will let both parties know how much you value students and the way you respect all individuals.

Equally important is how to behave when students approach you while you are talking with someone else. Assume they have an important need, and briefly excuse yourself. Turn to the student, and, once you have ascertained the nature of the request, say how long you expect to be before you will be able to respond. (Remind students, if necessary, to say "excuse me" when they need to interrupt.)

SETTING THE TONE

How good are you at remembering names?

_____

What tricks are you practicing to help you?

_____

You are talking to a student and a teacher comes in to speak with you. What do you do?

_____

You are working with a student and your principal drops by. What do you do?

_____

Would you behave the same way if you were speaking with another adult when the interruption occurred?

_____

Did you use your philosophy in making your decision?

_____

Managing the Library Environment

You will be held responsible for the library environment, and it can be a challenge. You do not have the formal arrangement of a classroom that subliminally settles students down. Younger students see the library as a chance to run free—sometimes literally. Older ones seize the opportunity to socialize. Noise levels climb. What is good noise? How much is too much?

Once behavior gets out of hand, getting the situation back to optimum levels is an uphill struggle. Too often you end up raising your voice and showing your annoyance. Students know you have lost control, which means they have it. Your objective is to create an environment where you assume and expect good behavior and have worked to structure their experience so you get that outcome naturally.

You have already begun the process by the steps you took to begin building a positive relationship with students. Now take it further by showing them how much you value them and their time while still guiding them to maintain a proper noise level.

Listening Matters

While the last section described respectful ways of handling interruptions, being an active listener is another important skill for you to develop. You are always busy, and it is easy to rush to a solution with a student so that you can move on to the next task. Modes of language vary across the generations, and without being aware of it, you may misunderstand a request.

Take time to hear what is being said. Restate what you believe you heard and ask if that is what was meant. Be sure that your response was understood. Try hard not to be thinking of other things as you deal with the question. People—even young students—can sense impatience. Remind yourself that they are the reason for everything you do.

Somewhere in library school the "reference interview" was discussed. Asking students if a specific class prompted their request can help you identify what they need to find. Knowing whether they are searching for "youth in Asia" or "euthanasia" will save you and them from wasting time. Check to be sure that the answer you located or the source to which you directed someone met the information need.

Your listening will also serve as a role model for how you expect students to behave as well. In a world where Instagram, blogging, Tweeting, and text messaging are major forms of communication, young people are accustomed to getting

their words out almost without paying any attention to what is coming in. It is a very egocentric environment. Yet one of the important skills students must master is learning to listen before jumping in with a question or comment. Even worse, they often fail to follow directions for an assignment, assuming they understand what was being asked without having really heard what was said.

Building listening skills begins at an early age. Preparing students for author visits, as discussed in chapter 6, is an opportunity to teach them how to tune in to what is being said so they won't repeat the same questions others have already inquired about. When you are teaching a class, you can further develop this ability by having them restate what you have said. (This will also help them learn to paraphrase.)

LISTEN UP

A high school student says he needs "books on Peru."
What questions should you ask?

An elementary student makes the same request.
What questions should you ask?

Did you ask if there was something specific about the country they needed to know?

Did you check to find out if they needed maps or other graphics?

A Sense of Order

While the "shushing" librarian (now an action figure) is still a prevailing stereotype, silent libraries for the most part no longer exist, creating a problem for the new SL. How do you maintain discipline? How much noise is acceptable?

Dealing with Noise

You will need to find a tolerable noise level somewhere along the continuum, with absolute control at one end and chaos at the other. Both are unacceptable,

but what is the ideal? The answer is not a matter of decibel level but rather a delicate balance of tolerance and flexibility. If it is impossible to hold a conversation because of the din, things are out of control. On the other hand, if you are in a large school and several classes are busy researching and students are also doing individual assignments, there will be lots of conversations going on. Most students are comfortable working and studying with a fair amount of background noise. Adults tend to prefer a quieter environment. You need to find an acceptable compromise—weighted toward what students prefer.

When a few students become gregarious and call across to friends, others raise their voices to speak over them and soon you are aware that the place is loud. Your knee-jerk reaction might lead you to shout out that everyone needs to get quieter. While this produces temporary results, avoid the practice except in those extreme cases when you cannot isolate the chief source of the noise. If you do this only rarely, students will recognize that they have pushed you too far.

Instead, to reduce the tumult, go over to the main culprits and remind them to lower their voices. On occasion, the leaders, looking for an opportunity to extend their fun, point out that they are not the only ones responsible. Calmly respond that you will attend to the others afterward but right now you are talking to them. Keep your word, and go over to the remaining noisy groups, bringing them the same message.

Another tactic students employ is to get you involved in a debate over their behavior. They will want to know what is too loud, or why the rule is necessary. Do not let them pull you off track. Avoid engaging in an argument and trying to out-reason them. You will be playing into their hands. Just calmly repeat that they need to lower their voices—and repeat it—and repeat it, until they realize they are not getting the reaction they want.

Flexibility comes into play at different times of the day or seasons of the year. If the library is filled during lunch period, you may allow a more sociable level of conversation. If you have a classroom or lab as part of the facility, you can make that a silent work area during this time for those who prefer quiet. Just before vacations, noise rises and you will drive yourself crazy if you try to maintain the usual decibel level. Just focus on keeping things from getting out of hand. The same advice holds in areas where snow can cause schools to close. If it appears that an early dismissal is possible, voices get louder—no matter what the students' ages are.

Approaches to Discipline

One of the trickiest aspects of discipline is what to do when teachers bring in their classes but ignore their students' behavior. Much like having invited a guest with unruly children into your home, you must be careful about what you do.

If the disruption is limited, you can speak quietly to those causing the disturbance, reminding them of what is not appropriate in the library.

On occasion, teachers let their students get completely out of hand, and you need to be more assertive. Initially, ask them to get the class under control. Instead of making teachers feel wrong, suggest that students have become a bit too caught up in the assignment (or the impending vacation or whatever you can think of) and request that they be reminded to lower their voices. If teachers do not mind—or if it is a substitute who is in charge—you can take over. While it is still best to speak to individual tables, if you have delayed bringing order until the situation has really deteriorated, this is an occasion to raise your voice and let everyone know that the library has become far too loud.

New SLs (and probably teachers too) tend to worry about discipline and look for prescriptions on how to maintain it. The real trick is not to think about discipline—just expect it. If you are concerned, students sense your uncertainty and tend to take advantage of it. Having built a climate of respect, you will find that they respond to the boundaries you set.

TO SHUSH OR NOT TO SHUSH

How do you personally feel about noise in the library?

What might you say to a noisy table to keep the tone light and still get results?

How would you let a teacher know that students are getting out of hand?

Grading

Ideally, SLs do not give grades. With all the pressures and labels placed on students, there should be one place where they do not feel judged. But for a number of reasons, sometimes you will have to give grades, and on occasion you might actively campaign for the right to do so.

SLs on a fixed schedule have assigned classes and must do report cards—and even progress reports—to let parents and guardians know if their child is

failing. It should be impossible for a student to fall into that category in the library. Think about what everyone should need to do to earn top grades and structure your requirements so that all students can meet them.

A common pitfall is to incorporate unacceptable behavior into the grade. While you want students to be mindful of how to act in the library, do not penalize them if they misbehave. Definitely do *not* take points off for failing to return books on time. Remind students of your expectations and tell them that you recognize that they know better. Grades, if you must give them, should be about knowing process skills, not conduct.

Assessing Students

How should you evaluate students' performance? Consider creating a rubric that you share with classes. Focus on the students' awareness of basic concepts and how to utilize these as part of the research process. Assess the students' willingness to explore rather than the specific results they find. You are the process, not the content, specialist.

Reward good questions whether they are asked during story time or as part of a skills lesson. Acknowledge the thinking process that went into them. Do not necessarily provide the answer. Throw it out to the class. Ask students where they could look for a solution. By showing you value questioning over rote repetition, you help develop inquiring minds, the first step in lifelong learning.

Welcome students' mistakes, showing them the opportunity to learn something new. Fearing to fail is an obstacle to intellectual growth. Help students discover the thinking process that caused their error and guide them into finding the right answer or an approach that solves the problem.

As you develop evaluation criteria, keep in mind as a fundamental principle that no one should ever fail "library." The library must be a place where students feel safe and successful. Receiving a bad grade will make them think they do not belong there.

Grading at the Secondary Level

At middle and high school levels, you will probably not be required to assign grades. However, you can raise your credibility by grading "works cited" pages. If you have done a lesson with a class as they start a research project, consider asking the teacher to let you review the sources students used. You would only be responsible for a fraction of the final mark, but students and teachers would benefit.

For example, students quickly recognize that if you are going to be grading a portion of their presentations, it would be wise to check with you for ideas

on where to research, acquiring new skills as a result. With teachers, having someone knowledgeable overseeing the quality *and* credibility of sources used is often the beginning of a dialogue that leads to collaboration. While taking on this task will add to your workload, you get to see the impact of your teaching in the way students go about the assignment and you learn what changes you need to make in the future.

MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT

How can you use grades to promote your philosophy?

Identify one skill that students should exhibit as they begin a research project.

What different levels of expertise in that skill could be incorporated into a rubric?

What would be a good question from a student?

Cocurricular Connections

New secondary teachers are expected to advise a club, sport, or other activity that is an intrinsic part of school life. Often you are not asked to take on this responsibility (which may or may not offer a stipend), but you should seriously consider doing so nonetheless.

As a class or student government adviser, you get to know the student leaders. While they are not the only ones who affect how you are viewed, they do influence a significant portion of the student body. Academic competition teams are another potential opportunity to use your expertise as you help them prepare for their meets.

Among the clubs, an anime group can be a resource for identifying graphic novels you should purchase, while an Internet group can work with you on a web page and provide you with student assistants. Consider any hobby or interest

you have, whether it is scrapbooking or supporting environmental causes. See if there is a group and offer to assist the current adviser. Turnovers occur and you would then be the logical replacement.

Some cocurricular activities can conflict with the library schedule. You can rarely coach a sport because practice sessions are usually held every day after school during the season, making it impossible to keep the library open after hours. Other activities, such as mounting the school plays, are daunting, but if you enjoy them consider being one of the additional faculty helpers.

After you have been in your position for a year or two, you might even connect with students to start a new activity. One middle school SL decided to create a literary magazine. The reactions from students, teachers, and administrators enhanced her reputation and her program.

Whether or not you advise an activity, plan to attend some games or school plays. Students notice which faculty members show up. Watching students participate in something that is important to them reveals aspects of their personalities that you are not likely to see in the library environment. Be sure to praise the players or actors when you next see them. You will have added one more strand to the relationship you are weaving with students.

BROADENING THE CONNECTION

What cocurricular activities appeal to you?

Is there an area of such activities that you would like to develop with students?

One-on-One Teaching

Numerous resources offer guidance in preparing lessons for classes at all grade levels, but do not overlook the importance of working with individuals. You are unique in the school in that you do both types of teaching—and that when you do help one person, it is not remediation.

Personal contact can take place at several levels. At the simplest, it comes in the form of a location request. “Where can I find . . . ?” Whether it is a book

or information on the Web, always check back to see if students were successful in the search. Better yet, use an abbreviated reference interview to be sure you have understood their question. Sometimes the query is based on what they think is the place to look, but in actuality it is far off the mark.

Another variation occurs when you observe students at a computer clicking on one web page after another, or engaging in some other behavior that makes you realize they are having difficulty. Do not wait for a request for help. Some might never get to that step. Ask how they are doing and what they are trying to find. Offer a suggestion and see if they want more assistance. If they are content to go on by themselves, accept their decision. Not all students want you to work closely with them. When you have established a relationship and trust, they are more likely to be comfortable with letting you continue to help.

After a while, students will willingly seek your guidance as they do a research project. Use these individual instructional times to nurture the spirit of inquiry. Do not always tell them what to do next. Ask where they think they should look. If it is a blind alley, continue the questioning in a way that helps them recognize why that particular path did not bring results.

You might be challenged at first to decide how much help to give. The least amount of assistance is to guide students to the strategy they need (such as, "check the catalog"). The next level up is directing them to a specific location. Frequently you might accompany them to the stacks or work with them on the computer, and on occasion you get the information for them.

Over time you will learn what response best suits the situation. If the request is simple, let them try it on their own. When it seems that some instructional support is needed, you should work with them. However, when time is a factor, remember that you provide a service and don't have to teach every time. Occasionally you just need to help.

In all your dealings with students, you want to reveal to them how much they already know and how capable they are of getting to the next step. Showing off how much you know will not inspire them to learn more. A phrase to keep in mind is, "Be the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage."

Working this way with students is rewarding to them as well as you. As no one else is there to hear it, they are less afraid of sounding stupid or foolish, and so they ask what they really need to know. They also enjoy being the center of your attention. The process allows you to focus on a specific need and ensure that students have grasped the concept. You get to see their thinking process and what assumptions you might have made about what they know or understand. For example, you might have said something about checking the domain on a website, and they don't know the term *domain*. This experience, particularly as you repeat it with other students, helps you to refine your strategies when you are teaching a class.

How you treat students during these one-on-one exchanges will affect what happens when you teach a large group in another way. Those who have gotten to know and respect you will pay more attention and focus on what you have to say. The more people in the class who feel that way, the easier the lesson will go.

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

A student needs to use a book for a report on rain forests. What do you do?

A student is having trouble finding a good website for a project. What do you do?

Two students need a few books to bring back to class. What do you do?

Developing Lifelong Learners

The various ideas presented in this chapter all serve to turn students into lifelong learners, but to fully achieve this goal you need to recognize what attitudes they must develop. Most education today focuses on the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy. However, if you want to have an impact on students' learning behavior and attitudes outside of school, you must concentrate on the affective domain.[1]

Receiving, which includes awareness and selected attention, is the lowest level of the affective domain.[2] Similar to *knowledge* in the cognitive domain, it requires the least level of connection. Simply stated, it means that students focus on the lesson.

Responding requires a more active participation. Among the verbs associated with it are *ask*, *react*, *read*, and *respond*. These come into play as you develop lessons addressing the strands for "Dispositions in Action," "Responsibilities, " and particularly "Self-Assessment" from the *AASL Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*.[3]

Once students reach *valuing*, which ranges from acceptance to commitment, they are beginning to develop the motivation necessary for lifelong learning. At this level they appreciate the worth of learning for its own sake. Although a

number of verbs are possible, *choose* best illustrates this behavior. If students are encouraged to explore topics of interest to them, they want to find out more and come to value seeking information.

Organization refers to bringing together values that may be in conflict to build one's personal value system. Although verbs such as *defend, generalize*, and *group* are also used in the cognitive domain, here they are connected with intangibles. For lifelong learning to occur, students must want to have an ever-expanding knowledge base in order to be the person they wish to be.

The highest level of the affective domain, *characterization by a value or value complex*, sounds more complicated than it is. It simply means having internalized a set of values that becomes a lifestyle, in this case, that of lifelong learning. Verbs such as *exemplify*, *support,* and *uphold* illustrate this behavior.

Habits are not cognitive. They are based on what gives pleasure. If you want students to become lifelong learners, they must enjoy it. Much of what occurs in the school environment is apt to discourage learning. The library is the place where you can foster delight and satisfaction in knowing for its own sake. By creating that safe place where students feel accepted for who they are, where they and their information needs are treated with respect, and where the SL models lifelong learning, you will achieve your goal.

FORMING HABITS

Which affective domains do you address during one-on-one instruction?

_____

How do you model being a lifelong learner?

_____

KEY IDEAS

- Smiles go a long way from the first day to the last.
- Learning students' names may be difficult but brings large results.
- Respect is the foundation of a good relationship.
- Treat students with the same courtesy that you use with adults.
- Active listening is a skill that both you and students need to master.

- Determine the most appropriate noise level for the library.
- Discipline is easy if you expect it and have built a climate of respect.
- Tread carefully when teachers fail to discipline their class in the library.
- Grading is sometimes necessary, but use it as an opportunity to encourage a spirit of inquiry.
- No one should fail in the library.
- Cocurricular assignments increase your credibility with students.
- Make time to attend school functions.
- Individual instruction can be the most important teaching you do.
- To develop lifelong learners, focus on the affective domain.
- Be a role model for lifelong learning.

Notes

1. Humboldt State University, "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives," http://hppa.spps.org/uploads/Taxonomy_of_Educatio_153946.pdf.
2. University of Mississippi, School of Education, "Bloom's Taxonomy: Affective Domain."
3. American Association of School Librarians, *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009), 15.