# 6

# REACHING YOUR TEACHERS

Every aspect of your job is important, but none is as critical as your relationship with the teachers in your building. Your interaction with them has a direct bearing on the success of the school library program. As noted in chapter 1, teachers are the gateway to your students. After the first days in a small school, you probably know most of the faculty by sight. If you are in a large building, there are some you may not meet during the entire year. However, it is now time to develop the connections with teachers that will define your program.

# Core Ideas

As you settle into the school year, you need to touch base with concepts in *Empowering Learners*, remind yourself of your philosophy, and determine the best way to start collaborating with teachers—even if you have a fixed schedule. Taking time for this reflection gives you the overview you need to stay focused and prevents you from feeling drowned in details.

Remember while you are working to reach teachers that you are also one yourself. You are part of the faculty. Never think of it as a "we-they" relationship. It is always "us." Teaching is the heart and soul of what you do, and not only with students. Every day, in ways both obvious and subtle, you coach teachers and others who come into the library.

## *Empowering Learners*

Reread "The Changing Roles of the SLMS" in *Empowering Learners*. In discussing your role as Teacher, it states that you are expected to "empower students to become critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information" as well as advocating for "reading in all formats, such as graphic novels, periodicals, and online sources." Although the ranking of the four roles is expected to shift, with "Teacher"—currently first—exchanging its place with "Instructional Partner," now in the third position, you cannot minimize the importance of demonstrating you are a highly capable teacher.[1]

The description of how you are to function within your building probably seems a far cry from reality. In many places, no one thinks of you as someone who "works with members of the school community to develop the policies, practices, and curricula to guide student learning."[2] But instead of deciding that this concept is visionary rather than an achievable goal, start acting as though it were true. By behaving as a leader and always being prepared to participate (even if only informally), you will change how others perceive you. Ignoring what the national guidelines consider as your purpose will only lead to your minimizing

it. How do you expect anyone else to view you as vital to the educational program if you don't see yourself that way?

## Your Philosophy

Remember that your philosophy is what grounds you. Until it is a natural part of how you behave, you should look it over at least once a week. How does being student centered affect your interactions with teachers? You cannot be critical of them if they seem to put tests and benchmarks first, but you can make suggestions that tweak a planned unit so that it has greater flexibility and allows students more choices in their own learning.

Look for teachers who best model your philosophy in action. They are likely to be your first partners and may become your friends. Reserve judgment on those who seem diametrically opposite to your core values. As you become more familiar with them, you might discover that you caught them on an off day or that they are coping with a difficult mix of students. If you figure out why they take a particular approach, you can start with where they are and slowly win them over to your way of thinking.

## Being a Teacher First

Your teaching ability is what will gain you the respect of the faculty. Without it, the best teachers will not happily trust you with their students. See if a mentor—official or not—can watch you in action. If that is not possible, review with that person a few of your lesson plans to get important feedback. Sometimes you may be able to videotape your presentation, which is almost as good as being observed.

Recognize that you will always be "on." It is easier for teachers who only have to look good for a day when parents come in to see their children's classes; you are always on view. If you have volunteers, you can be sure they are not just attending to their assigned tasks. They are watching and judging you. Teachers walk in during their free time, and while looking for something in the library, take note of how you are doing with a class.

You will be assessed by your colleagues in far more detail than by your principal or supervisor. The grapevine in a school is always active, so word will spread. If you think a lesson did not go well, let others know you recognize it before the word gets out. You can give a reason for why you were off, but also ask for advice from teachers (or even your supervisor) on how they might have handled a similar situation. When people help you, they have an investment in your success.

If you are open to learning, you can easily become a great teacher. When any of the really excellent ones are in the library, watch them at work. See how

they are aware of all their students. What words of encouragement do they use? How do they make students feel valued? What do they do to get complex ideas across?

You can learn almost as much from less successful teachers. You might see how they shut down some students or make others angry and difficult to manage. Are they presenting too many concepts too fast? Do interactions feel stressful? What is causing the problem?

Think of the library as your teaching laboratory. Unbeknown to the teachers who come in, you see their best and worst practices in action. Each one can be a mini-lesson to add to the techniques you use to make your own teaching more effective.

## GETTING GROUNDED

What words in the early pages of *Empowering Learners* do you find inspiring?

_____

Which part of your philosophy is most relevant to your work with teachers?

_____

Which teachers seem most likely to try a collaborative lesson with you?

_____

What are some great teaching practices you have observed?

_____

What are some bad ones?

_____

# Building Trust and Relationships

You will not have a dynamic school library program overnight. While you want to keep your ultimate goals high, be realistic as to when they will be achieved. To fully implement all your ideas will take at least three to five years. You need to learn the curriculum, your collection, and the ins and outs of your school building and district. You will not know your students' strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies until you have worked with them. Reaching your entire faculty

(in a small school) or a sizable percentage of them (in a large school) will require persistence and time.

Whether you are fresh out of library school and filled with the confidence of knowing what constitutes a good program or you are coming from one you developed in another school, you will not win support by telling people how they need to change. If you talk too much about what is wrong, you will be ignored or worse. Some more experienced teachers are likely to disregard anyone obviously new to the profession as idealistic and not very practical. Their attitude is that they know best; they have been doing their job for years. They can be equally dismissive if you talk about your previous district and will see it as not applicable to their situation, or possibly become resentful because they feel you are belittling their school. Think before you speak. You don't want to spend precious time making amends for remarks someone found offensive or irritating.

## Teacher Care

Since nurturing relationships with teachers is fundamental to your success (although it is not one of the many items listed in your job description), you must always look for ways to reach them. The teacher area recommended in chapter 4 is one idea. Having photocopiers in the library is another. As teachers need to get copies made, they become frequent visitors.

When teachers drop by, engage them in conversation whenever possible. Rather than bringing up collaboration ideas, focus on who they are as people and what is important in their lives. If you talk about the job before you have built a relationship, they will dread coming in. However, they will love to have a welcoming ear to share their problems and their joys. As you get to know each other better, it will be easier and more natural to also discuss a possible project.

Having food available is another lure. Teachers often are busy and skip lunch. If they get hungry and know you always have something to munch on, they will drop by. Sometimes they miss breakfast and appreciate being able to grab a snack in the library. The rules for conversation here are the same as with the copiers: *first* the relationship, then the job. Many of your regulars will eventually contribute to the goodies, making them feel they are part of the library—an attitude you definitely want to cultivate.

While you should not use scarce budget dollars to buy recreational reading for teachers, you can offer them acquisitions you think will interest them. This is relatively simple at a high school, where you purchase many adult books. Once you get to know their preferences, you can let them borrow a new title even before it is shelved. Be careful, because some teachers may keep it for most of the year. Let them have only one until you see how quickly it is returned. (If necessary, remind them that you have other people waiting for that book.)

At the elementary level—as well as middle and high school—show your regulars books they might want to use with their classes. Whether it is a new picture book or a reference work, they will appreciate your thinking of them. If they appear to really like one of the titles, you can suggest a possible project with it.

## Confidentiality

Showing teachers that you respect them and going the extra step to help is important in developing the relationships that are crucial to future collaboration. Some of this was probably discussed in library school. What you do not hear about is the value of learning to be trustworthy.

Trust is at the heart of relationships. Without it, you hold a piece of yourself in reserve. If you want to work well with teachers, you must earn their trust. They need to feel safe when speaking with you. As noted earlier, the grapevine in schools is not only alive and well—it is very fast. You want to avoid contributing to it, particularly when you have heard some juicy bit of gossip or personal information.

Teachers need opportunities to vent. They often come to the library and explode about other teachers, administrators, parents, or students. It may be an ongoing issue or a one-day crisis. Whatever it is, say the appropriately soothing words, such as "that had to be very upsetting" or "I can see it really made you angry." Provide no ammunition for the teacher to take away, and *never* repeat what was said.

By not spreading what was told to you in confidence, you build trust. Teachers having a bad day will feel safe in coming to you. They will eventually tell you of troubles at home as well as on the job. While *you* should not complain about school matters (keep those for conversations with SLs outside the district), you can talk about your personal issues. Through these honest exchanges, you will get to know and trust each other. The relationship will grow and collaboration will follow.

### GETTING TO KNOW YOU

What do you ultimately want to achieve in your relations with teachers?

_____

What can you realistically accomplish with them the first year?

_____

What strategies will you use to build those relationships?

_____

With whom can you safely talk about frustrations and problems you may encounter on the job?

# Developing Collaboration

Although you were drilled in library school on the importance of collaboration with teachers, you may not have learned how to begin. If you have a fixed schedule, teachers seem to want you only for the preparation period you give them. Even in schools where classes are scheduled as needed, teachers may be looking for the room and possibly the resources, but not you.

Full collaboration, where you are equal partners in presenting a unit, takes time to develop. Do not see teachers' reluctance to work with you as a failure on their part. Look at it from their perspective.

## Basics

Teachers have no reason to change. As far as they can tell, they have been doing fine without you. They are concerned about high-stakes tests, Common Core Standards, and curriculum time lines. The pressures on them are intense. They see collaborating with you as keeping them from what they have to get done, and it sounds like a lot more work. And they are right.

But of course, they *do* have a reason to change. You know collaboration brings better results. You really want to tell them how great it will be if only you can work together. Realize that convincing them is like trying to describe a sunset to someone who is color-blind. Those who have not seen this partnership in action have no idea of why they would want it.

Do not let your frustration show. Complaints will only keep teachers away from you. So, how can you move them from disinterested colleagues to active partners?

You must be the one to reach out. Do not wait for teachers to come to you, and do not expect to succeed with your first suggestion. Keep the dialogue going. If one idea is ignored, wait a while and try another.

## Baby Steps

Your first project should not be elaborate. For example, if a class comes to the library to do research and you were not asked to give any instruction, observe what they are doing. Select something in your collection that would be *most* helpful. Perhaps it is one of your electronic databases or a new e-reference.

Once students have begun their research, show the teacher what you have. Offer to introduce it to the class—taking no more than ten minutes. Not only is this usually acceptable, but sometimes what you present becomes a requirement. As the period draws to a close, mention that you would be more than happy to do this with the next project. If once again you are not asked for help, repeat the process without showing any annoyance. Eventually, the teacher will talk to you about a research assignment before bringing the class to the library.

If you are on a fixed schedule, you will need to be even more creative. Listen carefully at lunch to learn what teachers are planning. Come up with a simple project students can finish in no more than two sessions in the library. Check to be sure that it will complement and not conflict or overlap with what is being done in the classroom. Have students do something large for their final product. Make an accompanying sign identifying the class and teacher when you display it in the library.

When the activity is completed, invite the teacher in to see it. Suggest that you would love to do more of this. Offer to write it up for the school newsletter going to parents. Depending on the relationship you managed to build so far, you may be asked to do another one. If not, continue to listen for ideas at lunch.

Collaboration implies joint responsibility beginning with the planning stage, but you will not reach that for a while. Because teachers are justifiably hesitant to add to their load, at first you must do most of the work. Once they see the results, find that information literacy skills spill over into higher-order thinking skills in the classroom, and recognize your abilities as a teacher, they will become increasingly interested in working with you.

## TEACHING ALMOST TOGETHER

What lesson have you done either in library school, your field experience, or in a previous school that might lend itself to your new situation?

_____

What is your best resource for a social studies class? Language arts? Science?

_____

Which teachers will you reach out to first?

_____

# Becoming a Partner

While collaboration is a partnership, it only lasts as long as the assignment. Being an "instructional partner" as defined in *Empowering Learners* is an ongoing role.[3] Once you have reached that level, working with teachers on projects occurs more frequently and naturally.

## Being an Instructional Partner

To be able to take a "leading role in developing policies, practices, and curricula that guide students to develop the full range of information and communication abilities," you must serve on committees or teams that affect these areas.[4] Learn which are the powerful ones in your district or school and try to get on them.

For example, there may be a curriculum committee with significant input on courses that will be added or dropped. Knowing changes ahead of time helps you plan effectively. More important, you can then work with the teachers who are designing the new programs and become an integral part of them.

Many districts have "professional learning communities." These not only affect what and how subjects are taught but also form important relationships. Whether or not you are compensated for the extra time, it is worth your effort to join one, since in exchange you get a forum for showing the value of a strong library program.

High schools (and some lower schools as well) go through an accreditation process. While everyone usually serves on at least one committee, you want to be part of a major one, such as steering. You will be working with the strongest teachers in the building, which will add to your own understanding of how the school works. Additionally, you will have an opportunity to let them get to know you better, and, to some extent, promote the library program.

If your district does site-based management, you must find a way to be on the core team. Of course, as with the accrediting process, you will be getting familiar with the more powerful teachers. More critically, you will help determine the allocation of budget dollars. SLs who are not part of this process frequently find they have little or no funds.

## Curriculum Mapping

Many districts are doing curriculum mapping to prevent overlap of instruction and to stay focused on goals and standards. The process involves collecting information about what is taught and keying it to the school calendar. For example,

the final document may show that the third grade studies several biomes in February and will give the objectives, resources, standards, and assessments for that unit. This helps teachers to understand when students learned what and where they are going next.

Curriculum mapping is usually subject-related, so teachers (and administrators) may not understand at first why you should be a member of the committee. Explain that as the information specialist you can be of help in locating information outside the district. Once the team turns to what is to be taught and when, your role will be to identify the existing resources that complement the units.

The benefits to your library program can be enormous. First, as with any important committee, you get to be among the building leaders, letting them see that you bring an added dimension to the educational community. Next, you become familiar with what is being taught at each grade level or subject area and when these units occur. This knowledge is a tremendous help in making purchasing decisions.

Last, serving on this committee puts you in a great position to build collaboration. Knowing which topics would benefit from research, you can plug them in. Teachers who would have never considered working with you now see these projects in the curriculum map. While they may be hesitant, you are aware of what the objectives are and have the needed resources. You will be able to guide the process, easing teacher stress, and you will be leading "the way to building 21st-century skills throughout the school environment."[5]

Some of the best materials on curriculum mapping are available through the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). If your library does not have books on the topic, go to the ASCD website (www.ascd.org) and purchase a few. Become familiar with the process, and then volunteer for any committees dealing with it.

## Sharing Trends

One of your responsibilities is to keep current with what is new in technology and the library profession. Going to state or national library conferences is the easiest way to stay up-to-date. Even if your district doesn't reimburse you, you should do all in your power to attend. In some cases this may mean taking personal days, but it is important for your professional development and for becoming a partner with your teachers.

When you return from these conferences, you are filled with enthusiasm and new ideas you want to try. Talk to those teachers who want to be in the forefront of technology or to try new classroom approaches. Even if you do not fol-

low up with a unit together, you will be demonstrating that you know what is happening in education today and therefore are a good resource.

Reading professional journals will also keep you abreast of what is happening. However, you already have a huge job with an enormous workload. Although this is not a high priority, find some time to review key journals and scan their articles. Focus first on those journals relating to libraries. *School Library Journal* (which you also read for book reviews) is a major one. The authors' own publication, *The School Librarian's Workshop*, a bimonthly e-newsletter for K–12 SLs, is another source (www.slworkshop.net). In addition to dealing with library program specifics, it also covers what is going on in education in general.

For a broader view, look at periodicals such as *Educational Leadership*, published by the ASCD, *Phi Delta Kappan* (which has wonderful educational cartoons), and *Instructor*. There are some shortcuts that will help speed the process. *Educational Leadership* has a theme in each issue, so you can put aside those that do not seem to have a major impact on what is happening in your school. In looking at these journals, focus on articles that are about the grade levels in your building. Scan opening and closing paragraphs, check tables and other supporting items, and look for new terminology. Think of how you could use the information—and with what teachers. This will help fix concepts in your mind. Then discuss it with the faculty members you have identified.

For subject-related journals such as *English Journal*, check the table of contents to see if anything would be of interest to particular teachers. Put notes in their boxes to let them know you are holding it for them. When possible, be sure to chat about the article either when they check the magazine out or, better yet, when they return it.

Once you realize that it will not take you forever to get through all the material, you will be more likely to flip through the journals. As you pick up new ideas and become familiar with trends in education, you can share them informally with teachers. Your awareness of what is happening—and what soon might affect their jobs—makes them recognize you as a valuable, and nonjudgmental, resource. When their supervisors ask them to incorporate a new approach and they are uncertain how to do it, they will turn to you. Most often, you can best help them by demonstrating the technique in a collaborative project.

## Acquiring Leadership Skills

Although this section has been exploring how you become a "partner," what underlies it is learning how to become a leader. Leading is relatively easy when you have a job that implies authority. Teachers respond to principals not necessarily because of their leadership skills but because of their title.

No one will ask you to take on a leadership role. You will not be given any authority. So how do you emerge as a building leader and why is it important?

There are several answers to the last question. On the most basic level, it is a matter of survival. The jobs of those recognized as leaders are rarely eliminated. SLs perceived that way are less likely to have their staff cut, and their budgets are reduced only when there are no other options. Because you have become a presence in the building, teachers are more willing to collaborate with you, since they get recognition from you and their supervisors for doing so. Your program thrives, and students benefit.

Knowing that it is important, how do you become a leader? If you have been following suggestions from this and previous chapters, you are already on your way. You need to have a compelling vision for where you want to go, be willing to take risks (small ones until you become established), accept responsibility, stay current with technology and educational trends, and be able to work well with everyone by discovering and acknowledging their individual strengths.

What you cannot do is hide in the library, expecting that people will notice what you do. You will never emerge as a leader if you complain about your workload, assume that what you learned in library school is enough to keep you up-to-date for a few years, and do not volunteer for committees or to be an adviser to cocurricular activities. Leadership is positive and proactive.

Although becoming a leader sounds daunting, just focus on what you want to achieve and accept setbacks as bumps on the road. You will increasingly gain the respect of teachers and others. Before long you will be regarded as a leader.

## PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

On what committees would you now want to serve?

_____

What are the dates for your state's next library conference? How do you plan to get permission to attend?

_____

To which professional journals does the library subscribe?

_____

What do you think is your greatest leadership strength? Weakness?

_____

# Teacher Styles

You are aware that students learn differently and you have probably incorporated Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences into lesson plans.[6] Teachers also have their individual learning styles and personality traits. You need to be conscious of what works best with each of them if you are going to be successful in collaborating with them.

Some teachers prefer a written exchange—e-mail and attachments—to outline what will be covered, who will do what, and what the culminating project will be. Others want to touch and look at the resources you plan to use without you hovering over them. A few like to have several in-depth discussions with you. And then there are those who still want to just show up and assume the students will figure out how to get the task done.

## Differentiated Planning

Some teachers will never want to work with you. While you can sometimes win them over, expend your energy in working with those who do. As you become increasingly familiar with teachers, you can use Anthony F. Gregorc's Mind Styles Model, which offers a Gregorc Style Delineator to begin mentally categorizing them into those who are concrete sequential (CS), abstract sequential (AS), concrete random (CR), and abstract random (AR).[7] Each of these personality types will require a different approach from you.

CS teachers are highly focused and do not want side chatter. Those who are AS are big-picture people who want to see the overall design before getting down to details, although they are anchored in academics. The CRs like to try something new, while the ARs love something that is touchy-feely. All types need you to bring a bit of balance in a way they can accept.

Most CS people tend to have rigid requirements for students and want a limited amount of time in the library. Try brief projects, but look to build in a variety of final products to allow students some personal choices. Be sure that they have to complete similar steps or components.

AS teachers come in with a large topic. They may want to give students free rein in choosing something within it, but they still want a traditional paper. Indicate, although you need not spell out the details, that you will be helping the students develop strategies to find their specific topics. Explore the possibilities of having a group project in addition to the written report.

CRs are fun because they want to be on the cutting edge. Since they look for something different each year, you want to start by brainstorming possibilities. If you have a new database, you can probably integrate it into the students'

research. Be sure to discuss trends you have identified in your professional reading and see how many of them can be woven in as well.

Reining in the ARs can present a challenge. They are willing to spend a number of periods in the library, but sometimes it seems as though they will let students take endless time in search of a direction. They usually have the class work in groups and do not always notice or care that they are socializing far more than researching. Suggest ways for individual accountability within the group's overall responsibility.

## "Challenging" Teachers

In any school, some teachers present a challenge. They may come to the library, but every encounter with them seems fraught with problems. Although they fall into the four personality types described above, they manifest these traits in ways that get your back up. You almost wish they would never come in. Understanding what these teachers need to feel secure is the key to dealing with them.

Controlling teachers need security. They are uncomfortable in the open, relaxed atmosphere of the library. Suggest that each day's work has a task that can be graded. Students can complete work sheets and maintain logs of their activities.

Some "stars" do not like the "shared billing" of a collaborative project. Propose large culminating activities that can be put on display with their names alongside the projects. For your first endeavors, these can be hung in the corridors rather than in the library. Acknowledge these teachers as the content experts. Your role is to help students with the process.

For teachers who always have a somewhat reserved, professional demeanor, you want to make a point of the standards that will be addressed. Be sure to acquaint them with the National Educational Technology Standards for Students.[8] These teachers will appreciate covering a new but required aspect of learning. Create a well-crafted lesson plan and show it to them in advance. Ask for their input, and take their advice.

A few teachers are so laid-back that their classes are noisy, unfocused, and regard the periods in the library as play time. Go along with the open-ended assignment and allow students to begin in the loose way they expect. After ten minutes, call everyone together and have a focusing discussion on what is working and what is not. The good thing is that these teachers do not take it personally if you remind the class about appropriate behavior.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

What are some personality types you can identify in the teachers you have begun to know?

_____

How would you describe your personality type? Is it similar to or different from the teachers you like best?

_____

Which teachers seem to present a challenge? Are their personality types similar? What does that suggest to you?

_____

# Author Visits

Discussing author visits may seem odd in a chapter devoted to reaching teachers, but these visits have a far greater impact if you involve the faculty. You will want to select the author with care, prepare students (and teachers) in advance, thoroughly plan for the event (making sure your guest is well-treated), and have an activity that connects to the day of the visit.

## Choosing an Author

Your favorite authors or illustrators may not be the best persons to invite. Not all authors are good speakers or are comfortable with students at the age level for which they will be presenting. Never make arrangements without first carefully checking around. Listening to authors at a conference is one way to learn if they will be appropriate for your students. Contact other SLs who have had guests for their recommendations. Your state library association's electronic discussion list is another place to request information. Ask for suggestions, and be sure you have specified the grade levels with which you work.

Authors are not free, so you will also need to find out if the ones you want are in your price range. Unless an author's program is already in place in your

school, you probably will not be able to set this up in your first year, but you can begin the preliminary work. Check to see where you can get funding. The usual sources are parent-teacher associations or local educational foundations.

Find out what the authors are willing to do. How many talks will they give and for how long? Do they present only lectures or do they engage in discussions with students? What is the largest-sized group they will address? Is there a limit to the amount of autographing they will do?

## Planning

Preparing students and teachers is the key to the success of the author's visit. You will need to let everyone know who is coming and when. In a high school, you will deal with only a few teachers in one or two departments. Keep the supervisors informed and be sure to invite them to the presentations. Check that students are familiar with the author's works. For primary grades, you or the teachers can read the author's books throughout the year, calling attention to particular themes or, in the case of illustrators, to artistic techniques. With upper grades, maintain a display of the author's titles, and be sure to purchase additional copies so there will be enough for students to borrow.

If you start at the beginning of the school year to prepare students and teachers for your guest's visit by publicizing the date and the author's website, having them read and become familiar with titles and think about questions they would like to ask, the day should be very successful. Authors appreciate coming to schools where students already know their work and can make intelligent comments and ask perceptive questions.

Order books to sell for autographing well in advance. Invite parents to attend if there is space. Ask for parent volunteers for the day, since you will need as many extra hands as you can get.

## Related Projects

Talk with teachers and look for curricular connections to the author's writings. In addition, devise some projects that connect with the author's work. These should be completed shortly before the visit so they can be shared with your guest and others who attend. Depending on whom you have invited, there are many possibilities for connections. The following are a few examples.

A "magic tree house" was built in the library in honor of a visit by Mary Pope Osborne. Every student received a half sheet of paper and was asked to use one side to make an illustration for the author, while on the other side they wrote a question, made a comment, or suggested a title or plot for an upcoming book.

These were attached like shingles all around the tree house, giving students the opportunity for one-to-one contact with the author, who took all the pages home with her at day's end.

Collaboration between a second grade teacher, an art teacher, and the SL produced a project when poet Douglas Florian came to speak. Students selected an insect, researched it, and then, using their notes, wrote a poem about their choice. They then worked on a painting of their subject in art class. The poems, done on the computer in different type styles, were arranged around their paintings and pasted together in a striking manner in a booklet entitled *Insects and More*. The poet was deeply impressed, commenting to each child, and was the center of a class picture.

When author-illustrator David Wisniewski was the guest, first grade students, enthralled by his stories and his cut-paper illustrations, done using X-Acto blades, brainstormed a tale of their own and prepared an exciting big book called *Space Players* complete with cut-paper illustrations (using scissors instead), which he was delighted to accept as a gift.

A second-grade teacher and the SLS designed an unusual and exciting alphabet book in honor of author-illustrator Jose Aruego's visit. Since he generally illustrated animals in his picture books, theirs was entitled *Aruego's Zoo*, and each student was responsible for researching an animal for one letter. They learned a lot and enjoyed the project immensely, as did Aruego when he was given the finished product.

## Preparing Questions

You should help students both understand and review the kinds of questions they might want to ask the author, adding still another dimension to the visit. Many students will be interested in the same information: how long the person has been writing or illustrating, how many books have been produced, which one is the author's favorite, facts about the family. They must listen carefully to the entire presentation, because often these popular questions are answered within it. Students shouldn't be so busy concentrating on when they will be able to ask *their* questions that they miss hearing what they wanted to know. Moreover, the presenter may surmise that they have not been listening or paying attention to what was being said.

Students must also be alert and focus on the dialogues between their classmates and the guest as others ask questions, so they do not repeat any. With practice, they will discover the value of listening, will absorb much more information, and their questions will become better.

## Final Thoughts

Give your guest precise directions to the school and the start and end time for the day, as well as your cell number and your school phone in case a problem arises. While you may have several people joining you at lunch, be sure there is adequate time for the author to eat and relax. Have bottled water readily available throughout the day. Make sure the check is ready for your guest before the day ends.

Finally, write letters promptly to everyone who helped make the day a success—the funding source, parents who served lunch or oversaw the autographing, and especially the guest, mentioning good comments by teachers, students, and parents. If your author has enjoyed the day, he or she will often put in a good word for your school with a popular colleague who may become your next year's celebrity.

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Is there a program for author visits in your school? Who is responsible for it?

_____

Where would you go to get funding for one?

_____

List three reasons why having an author visit would benefit students.

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## KEY IDEAS

» You must have good relations with teachers to have a successful program.
» Learn best practices from both good and bad teachers.
» Focus on your vision while keeping your expectations to a minimum.
» Don't criticize your new school or any members of the staff.
» Work on creating relationships before you push for collaboration.
» Recognize the stresses in teachers' lives.
» Continue to suggest new ideas.
» Don't repeat gossip or confidences.

» Start with small cooperative projects.
» Volunteer for important committees.
» By being involved with curriculum mapping, you can integrate the SLP into all subject areas.
» Read professional journals and share what you learn with teachers.
» Becoming a building leader is vital to the success of your program.
» Differentiate the planning process in order to respond to teacher personalities.
» In dealing with teachers, one size does not fit all. You must vary your approach.
» Even difficult teachers can be managed if you understand their needs.
» Author visits are another vehicle for working with teachers.
» Make curricular connections to enrich the value of author visits.

## Notes

1. American Association of School Librarians, *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009), 16–18.
2. Ibid. , 17.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
7. Anthony F. Gregorc, *Gregorc Style Delineator: Development, Technical, and Administration Manual* (New York: Gabriel Systems, 1984). See also "Gregorc Associates Inc. ," www .gregorc.com.
8. National Educational Technology Standards for Students, "Technology Foundation Standards for All Students," www.iste.org/standards/standards-for-students.