

Meetings and Lesson Plans, Oh My!

• Keep 'em Reading •

by | Pat Miller

If you are new to the library profession, you are sure to be wondering how to start planning for this school year. Even if you are more experienced, you might still be wondering the same thing. Despite thirty-two years spent teaching, I begin each year the same way: determined to be more organized.

My resolution to be organized tends to fall off about Day Three of the school year when the reality of the “many demands / little time” lifestyle sets in. However, hope is a sturdy thing, so this year my resolve is no different. Here is my plan for this year. Perhaps it will inspire you to make and keep your own resolutions!

Organizing My Desk

I once worked for a principal who had nothing on his desk at the end of the day but his planner, his nameplate and his pencil holder. I always wanted to peek in his closet and desk drawers to see if there were piles of paper and magazines stashed there. For all the years I've taught, I have had the ubiquitous pile of paper on the left-hand corner of my desk—what I call “The Important Pile.” Too important to file, yet not important enough to attend to immediately, the pile fluctuates until it ages enough that I can dispose of or file it.

De-clutter books tell me that having this pile is a no-no, but I can't seem to live without it. This year I'm going to organize it rather than swear (ineffectively) that I won't have one. I'm going to get stackable trays and label them with the day of the week. If something Too Important comes to me on a Wednesday, it will go in the Wednesday tray. On the following Wednesday, before I insert more Important Stuff, I'll read over what's there and either act, file or toss.

A year-end search of The Important Pile always uncovered numerous to-do lists. This next year I'm going to use the feature on Microsoft Outlook

that is an electronic to-do list. It also acts as a mother hen. It will organize my dates, prod me when work is due and has a wonderful check box that shows which tasks are done. Better yet, I won't be able to misplace it. Check your own district programs and see if you don't have such a program as well. The same software has a calendar that will tactfully remind me of due dates and other important items, such as “You are meeting with the principal in 15 minutes.”

Finally, I'm going to abandon my dream of neatly labeled file folders. I find I don't have a knack for typing and folding those tiny bits of card stock to insert in the plastic labels. Instead, I'm going to put a few hanging folders behind dividers for each letter of the alphabet. I will put manila folders, clearly labeled, in alphabetical order in those hanging folders, letting the folder tabs speak



for themselves. The system is fast and flexible, though not as enviable as my aide's neatly labeled and meticulous system.

Organizing the Library

After you've worked in your library for a short time, you will become oblivious to your surroundings. I was recently impressed by the lovely views at one of our school libraries, only to return and rediscover we have them as well. One summer, I visited the small town library where my parents live and made mental notes of the things I thought could use improvement. I was chagrined to discover the same problem areas when I returned to my library that fall.

Look at your library like a visitor from another district. Kneel to get a feel for the vantage point of your youngest readers. Check the appeal of the colors, clarity of signage and for evidence of the involvement of students. Does the library reflect you or your students? Are your shelves labeled simply with the fiction letters or the Dewey numbers? Think like your students and you'll realize how unhelpful this is to them. Get a label maker and identify the subjects of each shelf along with the alphabet and Dewey, particularly the subjects and series students ask for most often.

On a shoestring budget? Stand books on cabinet tops and shelves with covers facing the reader. If you have a birthday book club, ask for donations for book characters as well and have a small sign attached to the shelf where each stands (characters can be purchased from a list of sources at TeachingBooks.net, www.teachingbooks.net/vl.cgi?type=products). Every publisher offers book posters and jobbers give away posters of the major medal winners. Plants, live or silk, add color and warmth to the library and are often gladly donated.

Here are problem areas I've noticed in my own library and my resolutions to improve them:

- I tend to leave posters up too long. Using my nifty new online reminder system, I intend to change them monthly.

- I feature new arrivals by laying them out on tables when books are processed. Students check them out, they are returned and shelved and are "lost" to the rest of the readers. This year I'll get removable "New Book" stickers and designate a New Book area so we can feature these books long enough for more students to read them. Haven't you had students tell you they can't find a good book? A New Book area will limit the choices and help them find something they like.
- Our shelves are very deep and the bottom ones are nearly flush with the carpet. To get a good look at them, you have to bend in half or get on the floor. As a result, the books on them are less frequently checked out. This year, I'll put the books on the bottom shelf spine up so they can be browsed more easily.

I am proud to report that I also succeeded at keeping many resolutions last year.

- I housed primary paperbacks, labeled by topic, in rectangular baskets at a five-year-old's eye-level.
- I made and publicized a suggestion box for students to suggest ideas, titles and topics. It got much use and was the source of many of my purchases.
- We had student displays in the library at all times. One was our "Great Wall of Reading." We gave each fourth grade class a disposable camera and asked them to read a book of their choice (teacher-approved), have their picture taken reading it and then write and type a review. The library paid for processing, and teachers paired the photos with student reviews. We attached the photo and review to card stock, laminated them and taped the sheets in a zigzag fashion to stand up in the library as reader guidance.

Organizing My Planning

Summers seem the ideal time to plan because we aren't hampered by the frenetic pace of the school year, which often forces us to plan by the seat of our pants. Map out the entire year while

Keep 'em Reading

it is calm. Approach lesson planning with a skeletal framework in place based on topics given by teachers, events on the school calendar and library topics and skills. Gather the following:

Grade Level Curriculum. Teaching teams know which topics they will cover in each marking period, which key objectives they want to teach and which materials they will use. Some districts publicize their curriculum to patrons; others even have it online for teacher use and correlation.

Calendar Events. Plan lessons that correlate with Dental Health Month, your school's Sock Hop fund-raiser, etc. Have on hand the major school events along with events like those in the LibrarySparks calendar, or those at:

- **The Holiday Zone**
www.theholidayzone.com/main.html.
Find holiday activities for major celebrations.
- **Earth Calendar**
www.earthcalendar.net/index.php.
Search by date, country, religion or holiday. Many of the holidays have hot links.
- **Multicultural Calendar**
www.kidlink.org/KIDPROJ/MCC.
Search by month, holiday, country or author for explanations, customs and activities. The authors are students and teachers from around the world who add their own customs and holiday memories. You can also search by holiday + country to find comments written by children.

Library Curriculum. What curriculum must you teach and how can you correlate it with teachers' plans, calendar events and the sequence

of library lessons? What authors do you want each grade level to meet? Which books would you be remiss in not introducing to students before they move to the next grade? On which study and literacy skills will you focus?

Set aside a planning day and lay in a supply of your favorite snacks and beverages. You might even want to invite some of your colleagues, to participate! For planning purposes, I use a large wall calendar from Upstart (go to www.high-smith.com and search for "calendar") with major holidays and monthly celebrations marked, or get a blank one from the local office supply store. Jot down library and school events, celebrations and major units from grade levels. With curriculum in hand, determine what lessons you will teach each week to put the mortar between all these individual bricks.

Revisit your plan throughout the year, and go easy on yourself even if you sometimes falter. When the doors open and the kids swarm into your library, plans will need to be flexible. But without them, your year will be as successful as the Titanic. Hopefully this time next year, you can reread your plan and feel satisfied that you accomplished at least half of it. It will help launch the following year. Best wishes for a happy and organized new year!

❖ ❖ ❖

Pat Miller is the Library Media Specialist at Sue Creech Elementary (Katy, Texas). She is the author of the Collaborative Bridges series and the Stretchy Library Lessons series from UpstartBooks and Reaching Every Reader from Linworth.