

# Seven Habits of Highly Impactful Librarians



**I**saiah Berlin once said, “To understand is to perceive patterns.” During my 15-year tenure at both *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal*, I had the good fortune of meeting some of the most dynamic and successful librarians in every possible domain, ranging from academe to the corporate world, from municipal government to K-12. It was during this time that the most compelling of patterns came to me, in sharp relief: The most creative and effective librarians share the same qualities. Upon examination of their respective “road maps” to success, perhaps not so astonishingly, I concluded that they each deployed literally all of the same core principles.

The masterful use of these core principles rolled up to a singular and extraordinarily salient outcome: IMPACT. These leaders produced impact that was prevailingly obvious via results that they could clearly and compellingly articulate to their respective constituents and decision-makers. They built the basic foundation of their success by having great fidelity to adoption and implementation of each and every one of the Seven Habits.

Thus we’ve now adapted the “Seven Habits” in the context of school librarianship and the K-12 environments. The “Seven Habits of Highly Impactful Librarians” represent effective and proven strategies, rooted in research and evidence-based practice, designed to help you revise and improve how you impact the learner, to ensure you and your school library are woven into the reading, learning, and instructional fabric of the school.

## Impact Habit #1 - Build Strong and Trusting Relationships

**Highly impactful librarians** know that relationships are critical in order to obtain belief and buy-in from their school administrators.

### Why?

- Understanding what keeps your district administrators up at night allows you to strategically plan ways to support their key objectives and goals, making your role not only relevant, but critical to the success of the school and the district.
- Learning the district's specific strategic goals and how your work fits into those goals better positions you to integrate your own objectives, such as building a culture of avid-readers, into the larger district plan.

Recent research has shown a **strong relationship between test scores and the degree to which the principal values and supports the library media program.** (Lance, 2007).

### How?

- Repeatedly present district administrators with the variety of ways you and your library can:
  - ✓ Integrate college and career readiness skills
  - ✓ Integrate information technology skills into curriculum
  - ✓ Plan and deliver professional development, especially technology-based
- Collaborate in planning and developing curriculum and assessment

## Impact Habit #2 – Speak the Language of School Leadership

**Highly impactful librarians** know that they must be great at communicating and proselytizing the vision they have for the library in the context of the district's learning objectives and strategic plan.

### Why?

- District leaders need to understand how your goals for the library compellingly support the larger goals of the district, that without the school library function, their district-wide goals for literacy and learning are not possible. Being cogent and specific, weaving in the language most readily present in your district's strategic plans represents the best way of going about this.



## How?

- Knowing that the majority of school leadership administrators are focused on five key areas is a good place to start. These include:
  - ✓ **Equitable access** for all students
  - ✓ Measurable and discernable improvement among the district's struggling readers and learners
  - ✓ Creating a culture of reading and literacy
  - ✓ Ensuring all students are **reading on level** by fourth grade
  - ✓ Ensuring students are **college and career-ready**
- Having an awareness of what is happening at the district level, and being actively involved in the formation and communication of the district's strategic plan and mission
  - ✓ Regularly visit the school's website
  - ✓ Attend Board of Education meetings
  - ✓ Collaborate with principals on specific goals

## Impact Habit #3 – Be the Curator of All Digital Content

**Highly impactful librarians** know that they are distinctly qualified to evaluate, curate, and distribute digital content that best supports instruction. Highly impactful librarians must remain at the nexus of digital content/ programs and technology.

**Google** can bring you back  
**100,000 answers.**  
**A librarian** can bring you back  
**the right one.** —Neil Gaiman

## Why?

- As a librarian, you are the most qualified content "curator," using your skills of discernment to best determine what type of content is most appropriate for your students and teachers.
- The stakes are higher than ever as access to and transmission of digital content becomes more fluid via the Internet and mobile, where the sources/purveyors of that content are increasingly murky. Media literacy—the ability to evaluate and synthesize content—has never been more critical than it is right now.
- Due to the emergence of standards that support the Common Core and/or College and Career Readiness skills, teachers are seeking more diverse types of texts—called text sets—that librarians are uniquely qualified to create and deliver.

## How?

- ✓ Establish an awareness of and protocol for determining accuracy and validity of online content.
- ✓ Compose, create, and distribute high-quality digital content clusters called text sets.
- ✓ Strengthen digital reading stamina by driving students to more Volume Reading versus only Close Reading in order to build knowledge via text sets.

## Impact Habit #4 – Be the Champion and CEO of Independent Reading

**Highly impactful librarians** understand deeply the power of choice in driving reading motivation and ultimately improvement and growth.

For the majority of young people, **enthusiastic and habitual reading** is the single most predictive personal habit for the ability to **achieve desirable life outcomes**. (Bayless, 2010)

### Why?

- Independent reading is very different than instructional reading, in terms of seeking to cater to a reader's passions and interests, and is more effective in building fluency and vocabulary.
- Research shows that avid readers demonstrate both superior literacy development and wide-ranging knowledge across subjects (Allington, 2012; Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010; Sullivan & Brown, 2013).
- Research shows that children between the ages of 10 and 16 who read for pleasure make more progress not only in vocabulary and spelling but also in math versus those who rarely read (Sullivan & Brown, 2013).

### How?

- ✓ Establish a schoolwide or district-wide plan to create and grow an avid reading culture in your district, utilizing the aforementioned research to support it.
- ✓ Launch a summer reading initiative that emphasizes choice, as well as motivation to drive increased enthusiasm and excitement around reading.
- ✓ Create schoolwide and district-wide literacy events that also engender family participation, as you seek to reinforce to parents the importance of reading and books in the home.

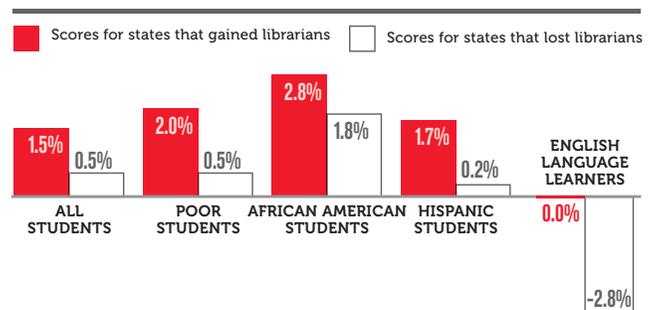
## Impact Habit #5 – Adopt Evidence-based Practice in Everything You Do

**Highly impactful librarians** know that data and analysis are indispensable tools that substantiate their plan and help obtain buy-in from school- or district-level leadership.

### Why?

- Implementing evidence-based practices will allow you to evaluate and demonstrate student progress in reading and learning.
- Helps you make a case for allocating funds and resources for materials or programs needed by the school library.

Schools in states that gained librarians between 2005 and 2009 had significantly higher increases in fourth-grade NAEP reading scores than schools in states that lost librarians.



## How?

- ✓ Leverage prevailing research (*School Librarians Work!*, 2016) that correlates strong and effective school library programs to an improvement in reading scores among students.
- ✓ Analyze your program and determine what it needs, as well as the desired objective (e.g., creating a more avid reading culture or more specific goals pertaining to reading/vocabulary).
- ✓ Determine the evidence that will resonate with your desired audience, and connect to your objective.
- ✓ Collect, analyze, and synthesize data to act as evidence.
- ✓ Package and deliver the data as the core of your message.

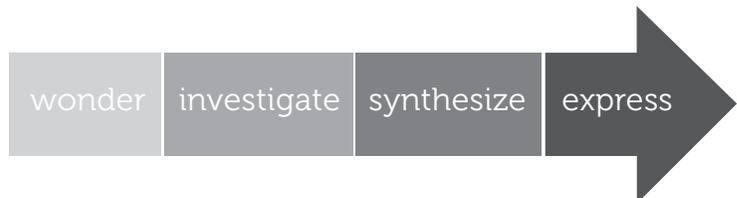
Source: *Say It with Data: A Concise Guide to Making Your Case and Getting Results*; by Priscille Dando, ALA Editions  
Graph pulled from 2016 edition of *School Libraries Work!*. Download the full report at [scholastic.com/SLW2106](http://scholastic.com/SLW2106)

## Impact Habit #6 – Be a “Teacher” Librarian With a Constructivist Approach Based on Inquiry

**Highly impactful librarians** tie reading to research to strengthen achievement.

### Why?

- Because research is the opposite of reading a textbook. A textbook gives you answers for you to absorb and memorize. Research is the search for answers, and inquiry allows students to test and re-test their hypotheses.
- Because infusing inquiry into your daily practice and instruction helps hone students’ abilities to respond to questions with evidence.



### How?

- ✓ By modeling and teaching good research skills, which support the inquiry process
- ✓ Use reading, read-alouds, and primary sources as a “springboard to research.”
- ✓ Curiosity, wonder, questioning, and the goal to “dig deeper” all play a vital role in fostering inquiry.

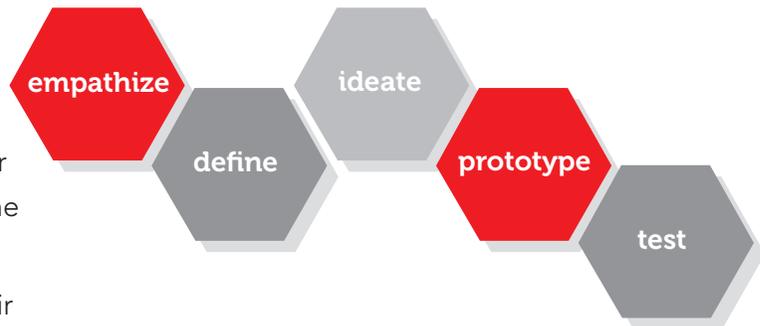
Source: *Paige Jaeger and Marc Aronson*

## Impact Habit #7 – Be the Orchestrator of Your School’s or District’s Makerspace Initiative

**Highly impactful librarians** know that the growing trend of makerspaces perfectly blends a constructivist approach to inquiry, problem-based learning, and literacy—all core competencies for the dynamic school librarian.

### Why?

- Because you have an unprecedented opportunity to tie together literacy, inquiry, and STEM and are the best equipped to make it happen
- Increasingly, schools are housing their makerspaces in the school library.
- Data shows that makerspaces are having a positive impact on student engagement via hands-on learning.



Source: Stanford Institute of Design, IDEO

### How?

- ✓ To get started, find a program from which you can glean ideas for your makerspace.
- ✓ Go to: [thedisruptiondepartment.org](http://thedisruptiondepartment.org) to learn more about how one district is evolving its makerspace initiative through the design thinking process.
- ✓ The Design Thinking approach helps educators—as well as students—assess their “maker activity,” from how to ideate potential solutions to a problem, to prototyping, to testing.

*Source: Andrew Goodin, Department of Disruption*