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An Educational Perspective on Customer Service

By **Anne Slaughter**

[Editor's Note: Ms. Slaughter is a teacher who is studying to become a librarian.]

A little background knowledge in educational philosophy can lend a helpful perspective to patron service in the library profession, where we are committed to facilitating lifelong learning. Recognizing the educational component of our work can enhance the service we provide to patrons of all ages, and encourage their growth as lifelong learners. Good customer service policies indicate patron-centered practices. In the field of early childhood education—where foundational educational experiences awaken a love for learning—being a reflective practitioner is essential to providing a student-centered education. But the principles that guide the basic support of young learners can apply to learners of any age. A focus on teaching the whole student contributes to students' general well being and increases their capacity for learning, and providing a good environment for that learning to take place is an essential component of quality education. An environment that is conducive to learning goes far beyond the physical facilities—the vision of the educators and their drive to provide constructive experiences is paramount.

Members of the community should be able to see that the library is there for them to use as a vehicle for their education and advancement, and that library professionals are available to assist them along the way. We can help ensure that patrons feel welcome in the space and free to follow their chosen pursuit of knowledge in some simple ways that can have a big impact on the overall environment. The Department of Education at Concordia University has a set of standards for “Teacher Dispositions”^{**} that education students use as a guideline for self-assessment. These standards—adapted for library work—may be a helpful tool for reflecting on your work with your library's patrons:

- **Delight in and be curious about human development .**
- **Value the importance of play, recreation and leisure .**
- **Expect continuous change and challenge .**
- **Be willing to take risks and make mistakes .**
- **Take time for regular reflection and self-examination .**
- **Seek collaboration and peer support .**
- **Be a watchdog and whistle-blower .**

It is difficult to stay focused on big-picture goals when the everyday pressures of your work life send you into survival mode. In any profession where the shift into sheer survival mode is never out of the realm of possibility, and where the people you are there to serve can simultaneously be your biggest nightmare, it is helpful to have some guiding principles in the back of your mind. Our dispositions not only affect the ways our patrons experience the library, but our own work lives as well. The icing on the cake, for library professionals and patrons alike, is the positive rapport that develops between the two—official policies and position statements aside, our dispositions guide our daily lives in the library. When we nurture a sense of delight in the unique qualities of the people we serve (not to mention our coworkers) and contribute to dynamic collaboration within the library, we are rejuvenated and lifted from the ruts of daily habits and

routines—which contributes to our professional development, as well as the growth of our patrons. Library service ultimately happens in the moment, and our dispositions can make (or break) that moment, for our patrons and ourselves.

*Adapted from “Teacher Dispositions,” Department of Education, Concordia University, River Forest, IL

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