

SCHOOL LIBRARY

Rocky View School Division #41 - Donna Miller

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Can you give us an idea of a typical workday in your Elementary School library?

One of the reasons to choose work in a school library is that no workday is typical! For the majority of the week your time is divided into scheduled increments of time which are dedicated to different library classes. The classes come to the library to find new books and hear stories and/or receive introduction to library skills. Hopefully what they learn here will assist them in using any library they choose to visit. In Rocky View School Division we are fortunate to have the same automated system in every school, so it definitely makes the student's OPAC and research skills transferable.

On the days and parts of days where classes are not present, I utilize the time to take care of all other administrative aspects of the library. In our division's elementary school libraries, the technician is the only one present and responsible for *all* duties.

What are your primary duties?

The short answer – **EVERYTHING!**

My main objective is to service the needs of my teaching staff and students. We are a K—4 school so that is why collaboration with the teachers is a primary concern. Because the students are still so young, it is through their teachers that they utilize the bulk of the collection in the form of units pulled at their teacher's request. Our school has a high level of circulation, so that is a primary duty. At the beginning of each circulation day all the classes send their books back to the library in advance of their scheduled class time. Because the periods are so short the staff wanted to eliminate sign in and allow more library time for finding books and literature exposure. As a result this duty takes up most of the a.m. time before recess. Fortunately I have some wonderful volunteers who come in the mornings and work hard to put all the books away. Without this help, an even more inordinate time of *mine* would be spent shelving! So finding, training and working closely with parent volunteers is another primary duty.

All other related administrative duties are part of the job: acquisitions (choosing, ordering and processing), research (finding, pulling, preparing bibliographies and delivering of unit requests and other queries), policy development (administration and documentation of), and collection development (acquiring and weeding. I always tell my staff "A full shelf does not mean a healthy shelf"), collaboration – with staff and administration, reports – budget, statistics and more, displays (bulletin board, story corner, shelf, and in my case the school's front entry display), promotion, public relations (GOOD SERVICE = GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS), technical service, organization (clerical work, physical library layout, job execution process, time management), professional development (reading, networking, workshops, courses, collaboration with colleagues within and outside the school). In addition to all this, showing the students how to use an online catalog and understand the research process and use of research materials is also part of the job. Promotion and display also play an important part of the position.

Determining the physical layout as well as creating and putting up displays all play a part of how welcoming your space is. You promote your library every time you interact with a student, parent, staff member, volunteer. To the people in your community you are the face of the library.

To me LIBRARY = SERVICE. When I talk to the students in their classrooms about what I do, I describe and draw my job as an iceberg! What they “see” me do (checking their books out, helping them find books, reading them stories) is just the tip of the iceberg. There is much more under the water line! It is all the work done under water that enables only the best to be seen above the water line!
So maybe **time management** is really my primary duty! Ya think??!!

What are some special duties you perform periodically?

Give the hidden instructions to kindergarten students that the elusive gingerbread man or Easter Bunny have left behind in the library!
Write anything requested of me – poems, plays the students perform.
Leader (with my principal) of our school’s recycling team.

Why did you choose to work in a school library?

It was the career that best suited my personality and interests. I’d always loved school, children, reading, teachers, children’s literature, and acting. Fortunately I graduated at a time when Rockyview School Division first hired technicians to run their libraries. My graduating class was the first group hired. Although I have worked with students up to grade seven, I enjoy the little ones! If I can spark in a child the love of reading that will last them a lifetime, I feel I’ve then accomplished what my *real* work is all about!

What do you think are the most important personal attributes or skills a library technician should have in order to be successful in a school library?

1. **ATTITUDE** – should be **POSITIVE!** If you do not have the proper attitude in place to begin your job you will have a difficult time carrying out your job.
2. **FLEXIBILITY**
3. **TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS**
4. **ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITY**
5. **SENSE OF HUMOR**

These are the top five. If you can master these, your training and talents will take care of everything else.

What are the most important soft and hard skills you used from your library technician education?

The training is so different and diverse than when I was initially trained. But the practicum students I have had certainly shone through. The education gives us cataloging, computer skills etc. I would like to see courses specifically developed to focus in different work areas. Have a class dedicated to school libraries. I’d love to instruct it!!! Softer skills are definitely the people skills needed to work in any library environment.

How have you seen the opportunities for library technicians evolve?

I think in RVSD their commitment to hiring library technicians for all the libraries in the division (for the past 35 years!) validates the standard of job we've all done. I have seen library technicians using their skills to do other types of work in business such as records management or database management.

What are some FUN tasks in your position?

Definitely reading stories to the children and doing books talks and poetry breaks! I also enjoy thinking up and executing displays in my library (and the front display case).

What makes your job the best job in the world?

It would have to be opening up new boxes of books! It's like Christmas! The books I receive in my library reach small hands and hopefully impact them with joy.

How do you keep up with the changes in the profession?

That would be through professional reading (books, magazines, and internet), courses, conferences, networking, workshops, collaboration with my staff and other technicians.

Over the years, how have you seen the roles change for library technicians?

In school libraries the job has gotten bigger but the hours in the day haven't expanded! The plate of duties is always added to, but nothing is ever removed. We are a visible, viable, vibrant, important component in the school environment.

In the beginning we had to continually **prove** our worth. We now proudly take our place as a **team member** and **colleague**, working side by side with the teachers to give our students the best learning experience possible.

Those of us who have been around since the card catalog and 16mm. projector days were the pioneers in the education environment. This work is a **calling**. It is something you do because you can't imagine doing anything else. I encourage all library technicians considering working in a school library to look upon it as a career not just a job. That attitude shift will make all the difference in how you approach each very, very busy day.