

“Reaching the 21st Century Library and Information Needs of All Students”

60-Minute Breakout Presentation, May 20, 2014, 2PM, Rm. 303A

Abstract

Research indicates school librarians, although also trained as general educators, commonly lack the preparation, knowledge and skills to provide programs and services that meet the library and information needs of students with disabilities. Special educators similarly lack training in effective use of library programs and services, as well as awareness of the resources and opportunities that school librarians offer as teachers of critical 21st century information literacy skills. Information literacy is essential for student success in the Common Core history, social studies, science, and technical standards.

Policy makers and educational administrators are prioritizing greater teacher effectiveness, content knowledge, and pedagogical skills *to reach all students*, especially those with different learning needs. The best practices to resolving these challenges, which integrate students with disabilities into the general curriculum and lessens stress on special educators, include more effective and collaborative use of existing human resources, rather than placing additional demands on educators.

Educational research bears out the use of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines for differentiated instruction, and co-teaching by general and special educators in the inclusive classroom, which best utilizes the general educator’s content knowledge and the special educator’s expertise for making modifications, providing accessible materials, and using effective strategies for children with disabilities. Research further shows that collaborative, advanced planning of inclusive lessons including identifying and preparing accessible sources and materials, and shared instructional, implementation, and evaluation responsibilities among general and special educators are resourceful methods for reaching all children.

In addressing these priorities, **“Project ENABLE” (Expanding Nondiscriminatory Access by Librarians Everywhere)** was created to respond to the needs of school librarians for greater training, knowledge and skills in providing programs and services that meet the needs of students with disabilities in New York State. Project ENABLE is a free professional development program funded by three Laura Bush 21st Century Library Grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded since 2010. The project includes one-week, face-to-face summer workshops and a free and accessible training Web site. Benefits of this training include greater collaboration among school librarians, general and special educators, including establishing common planning times, lesson design incorporating librarians’ expertise in information literacy and research practice, shared teaching in inclusive classrooms and the library, shared and increased use of existing assistive technology and accessible Web 2.0 tools, increased awareness of individual students’ IEPs, and improved access to instructional materials in accessible formats.

After initial implementation, Project ENABLE expanded to have a national impact and to broaden its reach to public and academic librarians. To date it has provided five, 30-hour summer workshops to 71 national teams (comprised of a school librarian, special educator and general educator) and six national library science faculty to train their graduate students (pre-service librarians) for further developing their collaborative skills and resources for creating inclusive library program and services for all students. Summer workshop participants returned to their schools and districts to provide presentations, seminars and workshops to their professional colleagues at conferences, meetings, and in-service training, potentially reaching thousands of school librarians and educators nationwide.

Formative and summative evaluations of Project ENABLE indicate (1) all participants (including special educators) had significant gains in knowledge from pre- to post-participation in workshops, (2) librarians had implemented some or all of their stated action plan goals within the first year following the workshop, (3) librarians and general and special educators continued to collaborate on designing and delivering inclusive lessons, and (4) librarians shared their new knowledge and skills with colleagues at local, state, regional and national conferences, workshops, and meetings. Furthermore, the effect of Project ENABLE trainings was significant in terms of higher levels of skill and knowledge reported by participants for creating accessible library programs, adapting instructional techniques to address the needs of students with disabilities, advancing inclusive education goals, and building effective collaborations. Anecdotal reports from team members in the school years following workshops indicated positive academic impact on students with and without disabilities.

Project ENABLE's success further expanded (2012-2013) by launching six, free Web-based learning modules to make the Project ENABLE curriculum available to educators everywhere. The site has had more than one million unique visitors (1,082,991 as of May 9, 2014) and over 800 have registered for training. In 2013, the research team was awarded a new grant to provide similar training to public and higher education librarians nationwide (2013-15).

Project ENABLE integrates UDL with disability awareness training, inclusive lesson planning, knowledge of assistive and accessible technologies, and developing the collaborative capacity among participant teams who have little or no experience collaborating together, through a wide variety of workshop simulations, activities, assignments and presentations. Participant teams developed individualized action plans for improving library program and service inclusivity, instructional units for collaborative teaching, procedures for sharing and acquiring assistive technologies, and strategies for developing common planning time and greater educator-to-educator and inter-departmental communication and consulting.

The Project ENABLE curriculum, learning objectives, instructional materials, research findings, examples of learning activities from the Web site, and guidance for educators will be presented and shared. Visit: <http://enable.digital-literacy.syr.edu/>