Chapter 8
Special Collaboration:
Establishing Successful Partnerships between School Librarians and Special Educators

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides a foundation for the development of collaborative relationships between school librarians and special educators by examining the commonalities between the roles and responsibilities of the school librarian and the special educator, through explaining the terminology and legalities associated with special needs students, and by providing strategies, tips, and techniques for effective instructional design that results in standards-based, collaborative lessons utilizing the most current instructional tools and resources to motivate student learning. This chapter also examines the educational needs, abilities, and challenges of working with students with significant cognitive disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

For the majority of school librarians across the United States the most important part of their job is achieving the mission of ensuring "that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information" (American Association of School Librarians [AASL], 2009, p. 8). One of the primary strategies school librarians employ to accomplish this goal is to collaborate with regular classroom teachers to develop and teach lessons that help students develop 21st century skills such as problem solving and critical thinking. Numerous impact studies have shown that students can benefit academically from "instruction implemented in collaboration with teachers that is integrated with classroom curriculum" (Kachel & Graduate Students, 2011, p. 4). In their efforts to

reach the majority of the student population, most school librarians concentrate their collaborative efforts on regular classroom teachers. However, in order to insure that all students in the school population are provided with appropriate instruction and equitable access to books, information, and information technology, the school librarian should seek collaborative partnerships with other school educators. One such partnership that is often overlooked (Brind'Amour, 2010) is with special education teachers.

Nationwide, approximately 13% of school students are identified as having special needs (Scull & Winkler, 2011). Many of these students are integrated into classrooms with their regular education peers; however, some are placed in self-contained classrooms. By partnering with the self-contained special education teacher, the school librarian can provide resources and instruction to these special needs students. Collaboration between the school librarian and special education teacher helps establish a strong library media program that supports student achievement; yet establishing collaborative partnerships can be challenging. Studies have shown that special education teachers may not understand the role of the school librarian and the many ways that the library media program can support students (Farmer, 2009). Conversely, the school librarian may not fully understand the terminology and legalities that are associated with the special education field.

This chapter will provide a foundation for the development of collaborative relationships between school librarians and special educators by examining the commonalities between the roles and responsibilities of the school librarian and the special educator, through explaining the terminology and legalities associated with special needs students, and by providing strategies, tips and techniques for effective instructional design that results in standards-based, collaborative lessons that utilize the most current instructional tools and resources that motivate students learning. This chapter will also examine the educational needs, abilities, and challenges of working with students with significant cognitive disabilities.

BACKGROUND

The school library media center should provide equitable access to learning resources in an inviting environment that welcomes all members of the learning community (American Association of School Librarians [AASL], 2009). For many students with intellectual disabilities the library media center has a positive association and is a place where they can develop information literacy skills, self-esteem, and independence (Murray, 2000). The library media center is a place away from the classroom where students can find support (Jurkowski, 2006) and a place for students to learn to work independently (Downing, 2006). To insure that students are comfortable it is important that the library facility has a welcoming environment (Murray, 2000) has good lighting, adequate signage, and is well organized (Downing, 2006). The school library media center is also a place where special education teachers can find support and collaborative partners.

In general librarians and special educators "know very little about each other's roles and responsibilities" (Canter, Voytecki, Zambone, & Jones, 2011, p. 17). However, they have roles and standards that are complementary, providing common grounds for collaboration. Both the school librarian and special educator are teachers of information literacy skills, managers of instructional environments, and share a similar interest in making sure that students with special needs have successful learning experiences. They both are in fields in which collaboration is a key component of their jobs. It is one of the ten content standards for special educators (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009) and is also emphasized in the

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