SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY
Will
Will
“He was a beautiful butterfly” = “I am hungry!”
Will & the Library
Best Practices

How do we best serve kids with special needs in the School Library?
Due to legislation over the past 30+ years, many more students with special needs are attending “mainstream” schools:

“Students with disabilities made up approximately 13.8% of the student enrollment in elementary and secondary public schools nationwide in the 2005-2006 school year” (National Center for Education Statistics 2006 as cited in Allen & Hughes-Hassell 52).
Legislation

- **The Rehabilitation Act of 1973**
  - “Prohibits discrimination against individuals, including K-12 students, on the basis of a disability in programs receiving federal financial assistance” (Adams 54).

- **Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975**
  - Federal government mandated that students with disabilities receive special education services (Allen & Hughes-Hassell 52).

- **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA)**
  - Requires “public schools to make available to all eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate for their individual needs” (US Dept of Justice as quoted in Adams).
  - IDEA “identifies procedures for categorizing students as eligible for special education services and providing those services, including both how and where services are delivered” (Jones et al).
  - Creation of Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

- **The American with Disabilities Act 1990 (ADA)**
  - “Public schools must provide those with a disability an equal opportunity to all programs, services, and activities and follow specific architectural standards in new construction or renovation of older buildings” (Adams)
Special Needs in the School Library

Are librarians equipped to best serve these students?

- Many feel unprepared
  - 2008 North Carolina school librarian study by Kendra Allen:
    - Participants graded themselves on their knowledge of best practices in special education
    - 82% gave themselves a “C or D,” 8% gave themselves an “F”
  - “Historically, this topic has had limited coverage in our literature … “ (Nancy Everhart, 2010-11 AASL President in Knowledge Quest)
The good news ...

“While school librarians may not have a great deal of training and support to accommodate students with disabilities, they have historically welcomed this group of students” (Zambone & Jones 19).
“Be a model for using *first-person language*, i.e., put the person before the disability (Perrault 6)

- NOT Margaret is cancerous BUT Margaret has cancer
- NOT Beth is disabled BUT Beth has a disability
- NOT Will is autistic BUT Will has autism
Best Practices

- “Engage in professional development that increases your knowledge and skills in working with students with varying abilities” (Perrault 6)
  - Visit sites of professional organizations for disabilities (AASL SLM Resources)
  - Tutorials
  - Consider a school that serves special needs students for your observation hours or clinical experience
Best Practices

- Become informed about and acquire assistive technology & software
  - Ex: large print books, audio books, videos, color-coding techniques & use of symbols as visual clues, assistive listening devices, captioning features, alternative communication devices, text readers, voice-recognition programs, etc.
  - Try loaning equipment before purchasing to make sure it fits your needs
Best Practices

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
  
  Educational approach with three primary principles:

  - **Multiple means of representation** — give learners options for acquiring knowledge
  
  - **Multiple means of action and expression** — for learners to demonstrate what they know
  
  - **Multiple means of engagement** — to tap into learners’ interest (Wopperer 56)
Best Practices

- Have a balanced collection
  - Materials in a variety of formats and levels
    - Ex: graphic novels (aid students with hearing loss and dyslexia), audio books
  - Resource materials about disabilities for teachers, students, and parents
  - Materials that positively portray individuals with disabilities
Benefits of a balanced collection:

“It is imperative for [students with special needs] and important to their teachers that they are able to find literature at their interest level that reflects an acceptance of their particular disability or special need” (Kaiser 5).

“Literature provides the necessary perspectives for children and young adults with disabilities to see themselves differently, more positively” (Woppperer 28).
Best Practices

- Create a safe, welcoming environment that students can access
  - Eliminate physical barriers (narrow rows or high shelving, heavy doors)
  - Have clear signage, good lighting
  - Study carrels with side aprons to block out distractions
Best Practices

- COLLABORATE!

“[School librarians] must communicate and collaborate with general education teachers and special education professionals to provide targeted curricular, instructional supports as well as appropriate resources and technology” (Allen & Hughes-Hassell 52).
Best Practices

- COLLABORATE!
  - Join forces with classroom & special education teachers
  - Attend IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings
    - “supports, adaptations, and modifications mandated in a student’s IEP must be available in the school library as well as the classroom” (Zambone & Jones 22)
    - Help create IEP goals related to information literacy
    - If attendance is not possible, at least read the IEPs of your students
Best Practices

- COLLABORATE!
  - Enlist the administration’s support
    - For adequate funding & staffing in the library to provide materials & support to students
  - Work with parents
    - Can help you get to know more about your student
    - Be a resource for each other
Just as there are many different types of students, there are many different types of disabilities:

- Learning disabilities
- Intellectual disabilities
- Speech or language impairments
- Hearing impairments
- Visual impairments
- Deaf-blindness
- Orthopedic impairments
- Neurological impairments
- Brian injury
- Autism
- Chronic illness
Most Important:

- GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

“A first step to helping students with special needs begins with understanding the different disabling conditions” (Zambone & Jones 19).

“Best practice is only effective if tailored to the needs of individual students” (Allen & Hughes-Hassell 54).
“… it is important for school librarians to remember that students with disabilities are people first” (Zambone & Jones 19).


Hanson-Baldauf, Dana. "'Not a Life, but a Good Life is to be Chiefly Valued.'" Knowledge Quest 39.3 (2011): 8-17. Print.

Harris, Christopher. "Lend Me a Handheld: Assistive tech is as close as your mobile device" Web. 3/12/2011 <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/slj/printissuecurrentissue/889154-427/lend_me_a_handheld_assistive.html.csp>.


Irwin, Marilyn, and Robin Moeller. "Seeing Different: Portrayals of Disability"
Works Cited

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