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# Examining Inclusive Programming in a Middle School Library: A Case Study of Adolescents Who Are Differently- and Typically-Able

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## Examining Inclusive Programming in a Middle School Library:

## A Case Study of Adolescents Who Are Differently- and Typically-Able

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## Abstract

Numerous national and international studies have shown the importance of school libraries and librarians in students' educations, including literacy skill development and academic achievement. However, published research investigating school library accessibility and services from the perspectives of students who are differently-able are extremely limited, as are studies of inclusive library programming, or programming serving both typically-able and differently-able students. This case study examines inclusive library programming with adolescents in a middle school library. Findings indicate that the impact of inclusive school library programming was meaningful and often extended beyond the library's walls. Inclusive library programming resulted in skill development among the students who are differently-able and an appreciation for books and reading for all of the students. Lessons that began in the library, including those of acceptance and the realization that abilities are born through differences, helped define the school culture. The findings from this study are useful for guiding inclusive programming for other school library grade levels, as well as in public library settings.

## Introduction

Libraries have long been championed as "the great equalizers of knowledge."[i] As such, one of their roles is to ensure equity of access to information. American society is perhaps more diverse than ever before. One in five people in the United States is differently-able. The number of children and young people (ages five to fifteen) who are differently-able is 2,614,919.[ii] Numerous others may not satisfy legal definitions for being differently-able but face challenges with, and need accommodations for, weak vision, hearing, cognition, learning differences, or mobility, among other challenges. As a result, there is a strong need to provide library programming for this population in order to ensure that library services are equitable for all

students and patrons. Further, the AASL *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* states, "Equitable access is a key component for education. All children deserve equitable access to books and reading, to information, and to information technology in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning."[iii]

This article describes a case study of one rural South Carolina school librarian's efforts to increase the level of inclusive programming offered in her school library. In this community of just over 66,000 residents countywide, 17 public schools serve approximately 8,950 students. Minority enrollment is 42 percent of the student body, and the student-teacher ratio is 16:1.[iv] Living in a community founded and once thriving on the basis of the textile industry and agriculture, families are now struggling. Over 20 percent of families are living in poverty.[v]

## Terminology Selection

For the purposes of this paper, the authors have adopted the following definitions and terminology:

Along with person-first language (e.g., "person with a disability" replaces "disabled person"), "differently abled" is a synonym for "disabled" or "challenged" and is used to denote any of a number of perceived physical, mental, emotional, or cognitive challenges.[vi] Recognizing the many abilities and the autonomy of those people society may label as having a disability, the authors elected to modify the terminology to read "differently-able." This terminology is intended to convey that individuals are *able*, perhaps just differently in some ways than the people society chooses to label as not having a disability or as being typically-able.[vii]

Inclusive programming refers to programming in which both students who are differently- and typically-able take part. Inclusive programming utilizes instructional approaches that address the needs of students with a variety of backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities, as well as challenges. Such strategies contribute to an overall *inclusive* learning environment, or one in which students feel equally valued and to which they all contribute.[viii]

Adolescent literacy and adolescent literacy practices are defined following the definition of literacy outlined by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE): "Literacy encompasses reading, writing and a variety of social and intellectual practices that call upon the voice as well as the eye and hand. It also extends to the new media—including non-digitalized multimedia, digitalized multimedia, hypertext or hypermedia."[ix]

## Literature Review

"If libraries and media specialists serve children and young adults who are disabled without recognizing what they give us in return, we devalue them. We fail to see their abilities and their potential, and we fail to help them use their abilities and achieve their potential. When we see a child with a disability realistically, we discover a person who can enrich our lives and society at large."[x] The authors of the preceding quote, Walling and Stauffer, received national and international recognition for their seminal book *The Disabled Child in the Library*, published in 1983.[xi] As a groundbreaking publication in the area of library accessibility and equity of access, their book brought unprecedented awareness to the need for libraries to be inclusive. The authors' work was honored by then-president Reagan's Committee on the Employment of the

Handicapped. **Walling and Stauffer** continued to contribute to the body of literature in this area and published *Disabilities, Children, and Libraries*, an updated edition of their previous work, in 1993.[xii] Their work in the field was followed by Wesson and Keefe's *Serving Special Needs Students in the School Library Media Center*, published in 1995.[xiii]

More recently, advocacy for equity of access in libraries has been promoted through the guidelines and standards of national and international library associations. For example, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) published "Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth," which states that the "librarian will be able to identify and meet the needs of patrons with special needs."[xiv] In addition, *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, published by the American Association of School Librarians, calls for school libraries and school librarians to provide *all* students with opportunities to develop critical information literacy skills.[xv]

The standards and competencies from these and other associations play an essential role in establishing the mandate for equity of access. Unfortunately, barriers to equity of access persist in schools and libraries. Literature in the field, dating over three decades, has revealed numerous reasons for the disparity in library service for students who are differently-able. Some of the most frequently cited reasons include financial and other resource limitations (including perceived limitations), lack of awareness regarding the existence and impact of inaccessibility, and insufficient pre-service and continuing education. For example, Project ENABLE (Expanding Non-Discriminatory Access by Librarians Everywhere), which was established after a three-year research study at Syracuse University's Center for Digital Literacy (CDL), revealed that across all three phases of the study, school librarians rated their services to students with disabilities lowest on all surveys. No librarian reported providing separate instruction to students with individualized education programs (IEPs).[xvi] Similarly, Allen found that the majority of library media specialists she surveyed felt inadequate in their knowledge regarding special education.[xvii]

In recent years, other studies have examined the ways in which school librarians can be better prepared to work with students who are differently-able. In her study regarding school library media specialists collaborating with special education (SPED) educators, Farmer concluded that librarians and SPED teachers need to collaborate regarding the best resources and services for students with special needs.[xviii] In addition, a study by Subramaniam, Oxley, and Kodama demonstrated the importance of pre-service and in-service training for school librarians working with students with disabilities in special education and non-special education schools.[xix] The authors recommend that library and information science programs include information about SPED services in their courses. The current study investigates inclusive library programming and offers librarians the opportunity to learn about the positive impacts of inclusive library programming and to develop strategies to help make it happen.

## Methodology

Case study is defined as "an intensive, holistic, description and analysis of a single case, phenomenon, or social unit."[xx] For this case study, we examined an inclusive library program in a middle school library in rural South Carolina. A case study was the preferred methodology for this research because it allowed us to retain the meaningful and holistic characteristics of authentic situations in natural settings.[xxi] A non-experimental research design was used in order

to explore the relationship between inclusive library practices in a school library and their effect on students and the overall school community. We interviewed differently-able and typically-able students, the school librarian, the classroom teacher, a teaching assistant, and the principal to develop an understanding of characteristics that may enhance inclusive programming in libraries.

The theoretical framework for this study is based on social interpretations of critical theory. According to Merriam, critical qualitative research "uncovers, examines, and critiques the social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our ways of thinking and being in the world."[xxii] Cresswell and Merriam posit that the ultimate objective of this type of critique is to free ourselves from the constraints of assumptions about race, class, and gender and to become empowered to transcend those biases. This also has direct application to perceptions of ability.[xxiii] Since "the stigma of a disability will never diminish as long as the needs of children with disabilities are defined outside of the context of the needs of all children,"[xxiv] critical theory calls into question non-inclusive library programming. It offers opportunities for an understanding of inclusion, not as the need for programming with separatist or segregationist tendencies, but rather the direct application of best practices, including those defined in the AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:
1. What are the ways in which typically- and differently-able students respond to inclusive library programming?
2. What are the ways in which inclusive library programming affects the overall school culture?

**Participants**

Study participants included ten students who are differently-able and four who are typically-able, as well as the school librarian, the classroom teacher, teaching assistants, and the school principal. The students who are differently-able are in a special needs enrichment class at Jackson Middle School (pseudonym). All students are members of a group now officially named "The Friday Boyz and Star." The group's name was selected because the sessions are held on Fridays and initially all the students in the class were males; when a female student named Star joined, they became "The Friday Boyz and Star."

The students ranged in age from ten to fifteen years old. A brief description of each differently-able participant is provided below, followed by descriptions of the typically-able students who participated in the study. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper in all references to the school, student participants, as well as the adult members of the school community who took part in the study.

*Differently-Able Participants*

For the purpose of this paper, the disabilities defined in this section were taken from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) website.[xxv]

**Miguel** is eleven years old and in the sixth grade. He has Williams syndrome, a developmental disorder characterized by mild to moderate intellectual disability, unique personality

characteristics, and distinctive facial features, among other characteristics. People with Williams syndrome typically have difficulty with visual-spatial tasks such as drawing and assembling puzzles but excel at spoken language, music, and learning by repetition (rote memorization). These individuals also commonly have outgoing, engaging personalities, and extreme interest in other people.

**Derick** is ten years old and the youngest student in the group. Derick was first moved to Jackson Middle School because he had run out of the building at a previous school. He has Down syndrome and autism. Autism is said to be likely influenced by genetics and is one of a group of related developmental disorders, along with Asperger's syndrome and Rett syndrome, known as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). ASDs are labeled as a developmental brain disorder characterized by impaired social interactions, communication problems, and repetitive behaviors. Symptoms usually appear before the age of three. As stated in the *DSM-IV*, manifestations of the disorder vary greatly depending on the developmental level and chronological age of the individual. Down syndrome (also known as Down's syndrome) is an intellectual disability originating from a chromosomal anomaly. People with Down syndrome have a characteristic facial appearance and weak muscle tone (hypotonia).

**Jorge** is eleven years old and in the sixth grade. Jorge also has Down syndrome. He is bilingual, speaking English at school and Spanish at home with his family.

**Robert** is eleven years old and in the sixth grade. He has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. Cerebral palsy is a term most often used to describe severe or complete loss of muscle strength due to motor system disease from the level of the cerebral cortex to the muscle fiber. This term may also occasionally refer to a loss of sensory function.

**David** is thirteen years old and has Angelman syndrome, a genetic disorder impacting the nervous system. Common characteristics include delayed development and intellectual and speech challenges, along with "coarse" facial features and light skin and hair pigments. Happy, excited spirits and laughter are also common.

**Jarod** is thirteen years old and has autism. Again, as stated in the *DSM-IV*, manifestations of the disorder vary greatly depending on the developmental level and chronological age of the individual.

**Nathan** is fifteen years old and has microcephaly and a spinal tumor. Microcephaly is defined as smallness of the head caused by incomplete development of the brain. This has implications for cognitive development.

**Charles** is twelve and has Down syndrome.

**Star** is fifteen and, at the time of the study, was the only girl in Ms. West's class. Star has cognitive challenges and some challenges with her speech

**Darius** is fourteen. Darius has microcephaly, which is defined as smallness of the head caused by incomplete development of the brain. This has implications for cognitive development.

Nathan, Darius, and Star all graduated at the end of the 2014–2015 academic year and are now in high school.

*Typically-Able Participants*

**Yhoselin** joined the "Friday Boyz and Star" by happenstance one day in the library. She visits Ms. West's class and has lunch with them regularly. She is now considering a career as a special education teacher or counselor.

**Amy** also joined the "Friday Boyz and Star" for their time in the library. She was a member of the Montessori science class that included Star and Darius on their science field trip at the end of the year.

**Tori**, another student who works with these students in their classroom as well as during their time in the library, says that "The Friday Boyz and Star" inspire her.

**John** is an eighth-grader who has been a part of this group for several years. He spearheaded the group of young men who went to the basketball coach and asked for Darius to be a member of the team. John received the leadership award at Jackson Middle School for the 2014–2015 academic year.

*Participants from the Administration / Faculty / Staff*

**Ms. Salley** is the school librarian. She has over twenty-six years of experience working in school libraries at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, in the public school system and in a home and school for children. Additionally, she has prior experience as a general and special education teacher and reading specialist. Ms. Salley holds a degree in Secondary Education with an emphasis in Spanish, and a Master's degree in Reading and Library and Information Science. She has been the Teacher Librarian at Jackson Middle School for the past eight years. She was named "Teacher of the Year" during her first year with Jackson Middle School and a second time for the 2014–2015 academic year.

**Ms. West** is the classroom teacher. The 2014–2015 academic year was her eighteenth year of teaching special education and her second year of teaching at Jackson Middle School. It was also her second year of teaching a population labeled as having severe/profound disabilities. In addition to her degree in Education, Ms. West also holds an EMD-Special Education certificate. While this terminology has now been updated, EMD is the acronym for "Educable Mentally Disabled."

**Mr. Paul** is one of three classroom assistants who worked primarily with Robert, serving as his shadow. As a pastor, Mr. Paul has spent many years working with children and teens.

**Ms. Jenkins** has been the school principal at Jackson Middle School for two years. She has always had a strong desire to work in schools and with students living in small communities. She has graduate degrees in Administration and Supervision and is currently pursuing a PhD in Educational Leadership.

**Data Collection**

The study took place from April through June 2015, during four visits to the school. The research sessions ranged from 1 to 1.5 hours each. They included one visit to the classroom, four 30- to 45-minute library sessions, and time spent conducting interviews.

Multiple data sources were used in this study. Qualitative data were collected from the following sources:

- Field notes and recordings obtained from observations during the classroom and library sessions
- Semi-structured interviews with the following:
    - Typically-able students
    - Classroom teacher
    - Classroom assistant
    - Librarian
    - Principal
- Photos taken during the sessions
- School district documents

Data were collected during each of the school visits. The first session began in the school library, where we met with Ms. Salley, the school librarian. She described her school library programming for various classes, including the special needs enrichment class that was examined for this study. These inclusive practices are described in greater detail in the "Findings" section.

Next, Ms. Salley took us to the students' classroom, where we met with Ms. West and observed her students in their classroom environment. The three staff assistants worked with the students while we interviewed Ms. West. As part of the interview, she provided the researchers with a profile of each student's academic, social, and physical abilities and challenges. After gathering this information and observing the students, we joined the students, Ms. West, and the assistants in the library for their weekly library visit. The other three sessions took place entirely in the library.

In order to allow for different perspectives, each researcher took extensive field notes and recorded the sessions while we observed the students in their classroom and during the library sessions. In addition, a photographer from the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina accompanied us on one of the visits to take pictures of the students as they participated in the library programming. We also observed how typically-able students responded to their differently-able peers, when they joined in on some of the library activities. The observations and the photographs enabled us to examine the specific ways both sets of adolescents responded to inclusive library practices.

Due to the limited nature of the differently-able participants' verbal skills, we were unable to formally interview them for this study. We did, however, have informal conversations with them during our visits, and we were able to observe verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with other members of the school population to gain insight into their experiences with the members of the special needs enrichment class. During all of the sessions, probe-based interview questions were used to help maintain the focus of the discussion. This approach enabled us to elicit, as needed, the most complete answers to the questions. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews with Ms. Salley, the librarian; Ms. West, the classroom teacher; and Mr. Paul, an assistant in Ms. West's classroom. The final set of interviews was conducted with typically-able students and the principal of the school, Ms.

Jenkins. These students were identified by Ms. Salley and Ms. West, since they frequently took part in the inclusive library sessions, as well as other school events. These authentic conversations allowed us to further examine the participants' behaviors and the effect of inclusive library practices through the eyes of several members of the school community.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis consisted of both descriptive analysis and thematic development. To analyze data from all of the sessions, we independently read and reread the field notes and transcripts from the interviews. Next, we independently took notes and coded the data until patterns and themes emerged. After each researcher completed coding, we met to compare the themes and findings that developed from our individual analyses of the data. We discussed the themes and documented their frequency until we reached a consensus on what to include in our findings. This process led to the selection of five major themes, which are presented in the "Findings" section below.

# Findings

In addition to interviews and observations, findings from this study are based on the inclusive practices observed during each library programming session, including scaffolding techniques— such as student questioning and discussion—context clues, and summarizing strategies. Other examples included reading aloud from picture books, showing the students storybook plush characters, and using visual aids such as videos, posters, and flags. Ms. Salley also incorporated the use of auditory skills when she had the students listen to and sing along with music. Finally, another inclusive practice that the researchers observed pertains to the classification system used in the library. Rather than labeling the picture books that she uses with the students as "E" or "Easy" books, typically used for younger readers, Ms. Salley uses "QR" for "Quick Read."

The five themes that emerged from the data analysis are as follows:

- The Door Is Always Open
- Individualize, Don't Generalize . . . Engage
- Accepting and Embracing Differences
- Skill Development
- Beyond the Library

The findings and comments from participants based on these themes are presented below, along with references to best practices that were observed throughout the study.

**The Door Is Always Open**

The theme of the library serving as an open and welcoming hub of the school was prevalent throughout the study. During our visits, the door to the Jackson Middle School Library was always open, both physically and metaphorically. Cheerful flags hang in the library, alongside school trophies, gnomes and other statues, a hornets' nest, and plants. The typical library program that we observed began with Ms. Salley using a picture book to tell a story, followed by an interactive literary activity, and ending with the students singing and dancing to their favorite

songs. Once the library class ended, the students selected books to take back to their classroom. Mr. Paul, an assistant in Ms. West's class, told us that the students liked selecting their own books. As he said, "They are excited to share their books and pass them around. They take the books back to the classroom and continue to enjoy them with one another throughout the week." In addition, Mr. Paul said the students look forward to coming to the library and find it to be a very rewarding experience. "They know that if they work on learning and reading, Ms. Salley will give them books they'll love and enjoy."

Ms. West and the classroom assistants reported that Ms. Salley worked with students to build relationships and a love for library time by honoring their individual needs. As Mr. Paul stated, "Even the students who were unable to speak were given a 'voice' through their physical actions." For example, when Derick participated in an animal matching game using the whiteboard, he was unable to say "owl." Ms. Salley pointed to the owl, and she asked the other students to say its name to help Derick. Then, when Derick could not physically move the stylus to make the match, she held his hand and helped him guide the stylus to the owl. Derick looked back at her smiling when she praised him for the correct answer.

Ms. Salley also made every effort to have typically-able students interact with Ms. West's students when they came for their library visits. If they were in the library at the same time, the typically-able students were invited to take part in the dancing that was held at the end of every library class for Ms. West's students. Ms. West commented that several of the typically-able kids felt so welcome that they began asking their teachers if they could come to the library to help the Friday Boyz and Star each week. She stated, "Ms. Salley makes it easy for people who don't know them to come in and not be intimidated by them." Finally, in another interview, she said, "Ms. Salley opened a door to change at our school."

**Individualize, Don't Generalize . . . Engage**

Another theme that emerged from the data was the focus placed on each individual student who visited the library. Rather than generalizing library activities into a one-size-fits-all program, Ms. Salley identified the specific needs and interests of individual students and engaged them, a process defined as "the joint function of motivational processes and cognitive strategies during reading."[xxvi] For example, after she read *Never Smile at a Monkey: And 17 Other Important Things to Remember*, each student was asked to point to their favorite animal in the book.[xxvii] In addition, near the end of each library session, the students were rewarded with dance time. They were allowed to pick their favorite songs. In one session when Ms. Salley asked, "What are we going to start with today?" Star yelled, "Justin Bieber," and all of the students started singing and dancing to "Baby."[xxviii] After that, several students requested Katy Perry's song "Firework."[xxix] Every effort was made to play a favorite song for the students, with all of them chiming in at the refrains while dancing. For example, Ms. Salley found out from Robert's mother that he likes Lady Gaga so she played "Edge of Glory"[xxx] for him each week.

Ms. Salley took the time to help engage each student with developmentally appropriate lessons, involving all of the students in the process. For example, after story time and the viewing of *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*,[xxxi] she helped Miguel use the whiteboard for a matching letters activity, an area of opportunity and skill development for him. She guided him with questions such as "A is apple. Do you see an apple?" and "Which letter matches 'ball'?"[xxxii] As she prompted his answers, she helped him move the stylus to the letters on top of the objects. The

other students encouraged Miguel and clapped when he was successful, actions that they had seen modeled by Ms. Salley, Ms. West, and the typically-able students.

## Accepting and Embracing Differences

A third theme repeatedly appearing in the data was that the library was considered to be an inclusive space where individuals are taught to accept and embrace differences. Ms. Salley encouraged all of the members of the school community to get to know Ms. West's students and to recognize them for their abilities, not their disabilities. As Ms. West said about her students, "A lot of teachers and staff who don't normally see the kids have gotten to know them through the library—they stop in to see the dancing. They wouldn't know the kids if it weren't for the library program." The principal, Ms. Jenkins, echoed this sentiment, "Ms. Salley makes it easy for people who don't know [these students] to come in and not be intimidated by them." Similarly, Yhoselin, a typically-able student said, "I am not scared of anyone anymore after interacting with the group this year. I am not afraid of being with people you are not used to." In addition to joining Ms. West's class during visits to the library, she now also visits their classroom multiple times each week and goes to the lunchroom with them, where she also lends a helping hand carrying lunch trays.

Ms. Salley also created a safe space in the library where the students, faculty, and staff are recognized and honored for the differences among themselves. For example, knowing that Robert was limited to his wheelchair during dance time, his classmates would swing his arms and roll his wheelchair back and forth so that he could be a part of the dancing activities. They also carried books over to him and shared them when it was time to check them out. Ms. Salley and the assistants made sure to walk over to another student, Charles, and engage and include him. Charles would sit by the window during library time. Since he chose not to get up and dance with the group, they would sit next to him and rock back and forth with him to the music, an activity that always brought a smile to his face. As Nathan, a student with one of the highest intellectual abilities, said, "We are all different, but different in a good way."

## Skill Development

Our analysis of the interviews revealed that the students developed a variety of skills as a result of their participation in the library programs. Some of these skills carried over into the classroom, and they appeared to be a result of best practices conducted by Ms. Salley. For example, when reading the picture books to the students, she used the reading strategy of "text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world" to help the students make personal connections to the readings and make meaning from the ideas in the text. Ms. Salley related a personal connection that occurred when she read a story about Martin Luther King, and she showed a picture of the civil rights leader at the Lincoln Memorial. When she asked the students where Dr. King was in the picture, Darius replied, "Washington, DC," since he had recently traveled there. She also employed other literacy practices to help scaffold the texts that she read to the students. For example, she defined and repeated new vocabulary, and she frequently pointed to the characters and repeated their names. In addition, we observed that she often paused in the story to ask questions about the text. This allowed her to check for the students' reading comprehension and helped to ensure that they were engaged as active listeners.

When speaking about her students, Ms. West reported that she noticed a "strengthening of their ability to focus during read-alouds, [and an] increase in listening comprehension." For example, Derick and Jarod were both typically non-verbal students; however, they learned the words to the songs they listened to in the library. The students' assistants also noted an improvement in these students' verbal skills since the library sessions began. Mr. Paul said that Derick and Jarod were both speaking more in class "as a result of library instruction and interacting with older students."

Furthermore, Ms. West described an additional change in one student's behavior regarding the handling of books. Prior to the class visits to the library, Ms. West had to keep the books in her classroom away from Derick because he would "tear them up." After hearing Ms. Salley read aloud to them, he started bringing *Pete the Cat* books[xxxiii] from the room for her to read to them in the library. Ms. West noted that "the skills in listening and thinking that Ms. Salley would always encourage in the students led to me being able to ask for more higher-level thinking in the classroom."

When describing some of Ms. Salley's inclusive practices, the assistant Mr. Paul said, "Ms. Salley's incorporation of fun activities helps break down barriers and shows them how fun reading can be." He also pointed out, "She does a lot of repetition, which helps them learn their skills." The principal, Ms. Jenkins, described the "skills that developed" and the fact that concepts were mastered when Ms. Salley and Ms. West replicated activities and read-alouds in the students' library and classroom settings. She also said, "One thing they get in the library is information on their level. Informational text is read to them, and Ms. Salley makes sure they understand it." She gave the example of a Black History month lesson and said that Ms. Salley made sure that the students knew Dr. Martin Luther King's name.

It was further noted that some of the students learned how to match shapes and colors through the Promethean board activities that the students participated in during library time. These activities helped to strengthen skills related to the students' eye and hand coordination, one of the practices listed in the NCTE's definition of adolescent literacy. The successful use of the Promethean board in the library reinforced the need for one in the classroom and, subsequently, one was purchased for Ms. West's room.

**Beyond the Library**

The final theme that evolved from the data was that the impact of inclusive school library programming extended beyond the library walls at Jackson Middle School. The friendships that developed in the library between the typically-able and differently-able students carried over into classrooms as well as other school and community venues. The pervasive impact of these inclusive practices is characterized by Ms. Jenkins in the following statement, "There is lots of love for these children schoolwide—everyone knows them." Mr. Paul added, "They walk around the school and the other students know them by name and high-five them." Ms. West felt that these inclusive relationships were influenced by Ms. Salley. After witnessing how much her students enjoyed their visits to the library, and how much they learned from the library programming, she saw the value of getting her students beyond the four walls of their classroom. She said that Ms. Salley "helped push me into getting the children into other parts of the school culture."

One example of how inclusive the entire school environment became occurred when Darius was invited to be on the school's basketball team, after his typically-able friend John suggested that the coach invite Darius to be on the team. John proudly described how he would pass the ball to Darius in the games. He said that he only expected Darius to play "a time or two," but he ended up playing in all but two games. As several of the students and faculty members reported, Darius shot the winning goal in a particularly close game, and the fans from both teams "went wild." Darius was also selected as the "Most Valuable Athlete" in the school yearbook, a title that was previously awarded only to typically-able students. Another example of schoolwide inclusiveness is that one of the classes of typically-able students invited Darius, Nathan, and Star to go on a science field trip with them near the end of the school year, and Darius was invited to escort one of his friends who is typically-able to the prom.

From the standpoint of the principal and faculty who were interviewed, these examples of inclusiveness appeared to be unique to Jackson Middle School. For example, Ms. Jenkins commented that she had not observed these types of inclusive activities in the library and other settings in schools where she had previously worked. Rather, her experience was that differently-able students' activities outside of their classroom were "just in the gym." Ms. West observed that other librarians she had worked with in the past "didn't do inclusive activities."

The inclusive school library program at Jackson Middle School also provides students with an incentive to use libraries when they become adults. As Ms. West pointed out, the inclusiveness of the Jackson Middle School Library has helped her students know that the library is a "positive place to go, and it will carry over when they are adults and in the community. They will know to use the public library when they are adults. It will always stick with them that librarians can help them."

Finally, the typically-able students were also impacted by their experiences with inclusive library programming. The interactions with these students opened their minds to the reality that "a person is so much more than the name of a diagnosis on a chart."[xxxiv] As Amy said, "Interacting with the students makes me happy. When you do stuff with them and they say, 'Yay!,' it makes you feel good." John talked about how "inspiring" it was to be around the students in Ms. West's class. Tori, another typically-able student, said that she was "no longer afraid to be around people who are not just like me."

## Discussion

It was apparent from this study's findings that the participants developed a variety of literacy skills as a result of the school's library programming. The students in Ms. West's class were excited to take books with them after they left the library. This love for reading carried over into their classroom setting, as they shared their library books with their classmates. In addition, both the differently-able and typically-able students demonstrated positive responses to their interactions with each other in their inclusive library setting. The spirit of inclusion that began in the school library now defines the school culture and has had an impact on the entire school community.

The following is a select list of recommendations for librarians who are interested in achieving a similar culture of inclusiveness in their library settings. Although the recommendations refer to

students in K–12 schools, these activities can easily be incorporated in to programming activities for differently-able patrons in public libraries.

1. Visit the special education teachers in your school, as well as other teachers who have differently-able students in their classrooms. Encourage them to bring their students to the library. Take your calendar with you and set a date for the first visit while you are there.
2. Purchase additional resources that meet the needs of differently-able students. For example, if you are in a middle school or high school, add picture books and visual materials to your collection, if you do not already have some. If you do not have a smart board in your library, ask your principal for additional funding to purchase one, so that you will be able to allow for differentiated instruction for all of your students. Tools and resources can be selected with universal access in mind. Some resources may initially be purchased with the idea of meeting the needs of students who are differently-able, but many of these tools and resources will also support the learning needs of typically-able students with varying learning styles.
3. When selecting materials to use with these students, be sure to include books that have simple language and sentence structure, and that are high-interest texts.
4. When reading a story aloud, emphasize certain words and sounds that are important to the story line. Use repetition to highlight parts of the narrative.
5. Find ways to relate the books to the students' lives and the world around them. For example, "This is a story about a monkey. Have any of you ever been to the zoo and seen a monkey?"
6. Stop frequently and ask questions of the students to be sure that they are engaged in the story. For example, "What is your favorite animal in this story?"
7. Consider including multimedia resources in programs to heighten interest, such as showing short videos, YouTube programs, playing music, et cetera.

Finally, it is important that pre-service school and public librarians are provided with the skills they need to work with the differently-able students and patrons they will be serving in their future careers. Educators in schools of Library and Information Science should provide future librarians with recommended resources and programming ideas in their classes to help them feel prepared to work with students of all backgrounds and abilities.

## Limitations

The structure of the case study, which was comprised of observations and semi-structured interviews, was both a limitation and a strength of the work. Findings are limited to a select group, during a limited period of time. As is true of most qualitative work, it lies with the reader to determine which findings of this study are transferable to other contexts. This same design, however, allowed the participants' voices and lived experiences to guide the work for the study. Being immersed in the school and its inclusive library programming facilitated in-depth data collection and critical analysis.

## Conclusions

The current study is one of an exceptionally limited number to investigate equity of access to information for marginalized populations and inclusive library programming in schools or other

library settings. One identified barrier to inclusive library programming has been apprehension and perhaps even fear. Teachers and librarians, as well as other members of school communities, have reported feelings of inadequacy and even fear when it comes to inclusion. Some educators have commented that they just don't know where to begin. Thus, this study helps to fill an existing, critical need. What better way to learn about inclusion than from a librarian, students, and a school that "lives" inclusion every day and can offer best practices? "How can phenomena and realities be studied accurately if they are not studied from the perspectives of the individuals for whom they have a direct impact?"[xxxv] It seems that this sort of view is the hallmark of evidence-based practice.[xxxvi]

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) highlights the need for all students with disabilities to have access to programs, resources, facilities, and services of the school.[xxxvii] It underscores that all children bring gifts and strengths to our libraries and schools, and that access to library resources and services should be provided to every student, regardless of his or her physical and intellectual abilities. This study provided examples of firsthand best practices for how to create a culture of inclusion in library settings. Striving for inclusion means seeing students or patrons for who they are and for their abilities. It means refusing to allow labels to precede—and in some cases, define—people. It means caring. It means making a difference.

## Dedication

This article is dedicated in loving memory of Micheal Walker.

# Appendix

## Notes

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