

Book Reviews/Boekresensies

Learning support for special educational needs: potential for progress

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Learning support for special educational needs: potential for progress is a report on the LESSEN (Learning Support for Special Educational Needs) Project. The project was a study of learning and library support for Year 7 pupils with special educational needs in the United Kingdom. The aims of the project were to:

- Assess the support needs of pupils within the target group with special reference to the National Curriculum.
- Document good practice in meeting those needs, in terms of material, staffing and strategies.
- Foster collaboration between subject teachers, learning support staff and librarians in curriculum planning and delivery.

The book relates very specifically to the English situation especially as regards the National Curriculum and teaching practices. Parts of it are difficult to follow for someone unfamiliar with the system, for example the content load of the new curriculum. However, there are aspects which may prove useful to South African school librarians. In England the new National Curriculum requires that children with special educational needs are not separated in special schools but receive support where needed within mainstream schools. This is similar to recommendations in South Africa so implications for school libraries are relevant. The findings and recommendations relating to libraries are contained primarily in chapters 6 and 7.

The report indicates that librarians are responding to meeting the needs of children with special educational needs primarily in terms of stock. Librarians were aware that the stock needed to be evaluated taking into account these children's special needs. Efforts were made to identify suitable new books and build up a collection of easy-to-read books and picture books. Information books were chosen to cover a range of reading abilities. Stock of non-book material was also being built up and all librarians recognised the value of material in other media. Also a variety of programmes were set up by libraries such as reading clubs and information literacy programmes.

Libraries had various levels of success and this depended on a number of factors. An important factor was the seniority of the librarian within the school's hierarchy. If the librarian had a measure of seniority and authority, his/her

programmes and suggestions were more likely to be implemented and s/he tended to show more initiative. Libraries were being seen less as an adjunct of the English Department and more as an integral resource which should be used across curriculum. There was greater emphasis on information skills and technology and increased co-operation between the librarian and subject teachers. This type of co-operation is facilitated when the library formed part of a cross-curricular department. The library, IT and learning support departments all operate across curriculum, yet all have been (and sometimes still are) isolated. They combine logically to form a resource service to subject teachers. When they work together they are more effective and encourage co-operation between these services and teachers. Once co-operation was successfully established this tended to increase and a culture of collaboration is built up. The methods used to achieve this could prove useful to South African teacher-librarians who are often marginalised.

The school library will be called on to play an active role if curriculum 2005 is to be successful. Independent learning requires the use of resources and a high level of information literacy. Also, the increased multi-cultural makeup of schools requires teacher-librarians to re-evaluate their stock, taking various needs of the users into account. This report, although focussing on the English situation, does discuss the problems of meeting the needs of a diverse student population and have useful ideas for the teacher-librarian.

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