

A special letter from Ann Leader on how she adapted *One School, One Book* to the special needs children at her school in Enfield, Connecticut.

Question: *How did you come to rewrite chapter books?*

I have been a special education teacher in the Enfield, CT public schools since 1973. In the early 2000s the process of inclusion was implemented with great determination at the elementary level. No longer were students only assigned special education pull-out hours of varying length. Some students with significant cognitive, language, etc. disabilities were assigned to general education classrooms for the majority of their day. Modifications, accommodations and strong adult support was needed in order for these students to access a curriculum that was beyond their capabilities. I had one grade 2 student who needed an alternate vision.

Within the process of reasoning how to approach this task, I determined that the language arts curriculum composed a large part of an early elementary student's day. The basal stories, activities and tests as presented were inappropriate to my student's needs. I began by rewriting each story. I used the same textbook but rewrote and typed new text for each page to be inserted over the given material. I reduced and simplified language and concepts while adhering to the theme, characters, setting, problem, solution, etc. In that way, my student could participate in some level with his class in group discussions, etc.

In 2008, my school began the *One School, One Book* program. We were reading and responding to *The Trumpet of the Swan*. Again, I speculated how my student would be able to participate in this program. He loved books. It was suggested that he read an alternate book about swans that would be at his level. I immediately rejected that idea. The purpose of the program would be denied to him.

I determined that the only way for him to be able to participate in a meaningful way with his peers and as part of the K-6 school community, was for me to rewrite the book. I approached chapter by chapter. Each page of the companion book that I wrote had text and supporting pictures to help my student understand and apply the skills that were being promoted. As in the basal rewrites, I simplified language, reduced some concepts but adhered to the theme, characters, setting, problem, solution, etc.

Each day one member of the special education staff would read and discuss the new chapter with my student. In addition, previous chapters were reviewed. He knew the story as well, if not better than the majority of other students in our school. He was thrilled with his book and on numerous occasions, shared a chapter with his grade 2 peers. This also helped some of the other students in the general education setting who, for various reasons, might have had difficulty accessing the book.

I continued to follow the same process for this student in grade 3 with *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh*, in grade 4 with *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, and in grade 5 with *The Indian in the Cupboard*. To rewrite a chapter book and provide pictures (often with google images because I cannot draw) is very time consuming. I firmly believe that it has all been worth it. This student has now moved in the middle school. He has been a shining star for the inclusion process and I am delighted to have been some part of his success.

Ann Leader
Special Education Teacher
E.H. Parkman School
Enfield, CT 06082
aleader@enfieldschools.org