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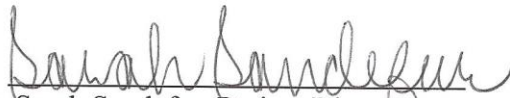
More than a Wheelchair in the Background: A Study of Portrayals of Disabilities in
Children's Picture Books

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Departmental Honors Thesis
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A review of scholarly research conducted between 2004 and 2014 revealed that portrayals of disabilities in works of children's literature were historically poor, containing stereotypical and negative characterizations. While noting some improvements, researchers still decry a lack of balance in roles of power between characters with disabilities and those without, a lack of depth in storylines and levels of character development, and disproportionate representations of disability categories, male and female characters, and cultural minorities in comparison to the true population (Altieri, 2006; Dowker, 2004; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches, Prater, & Leininger, 2009; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos, Moses, & Wolbers, 2012; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Koc, Koc, & Ozdemir, 2010; Konrad, Helf, & Itoi, 2007; Kunze, 2013; Leininger, Dyches, Prater, & Heath, 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; McGovern, 2014; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006; Wopperer, 2011; Worotyec, 2004). I evaluated the quality of disability portrayals in fifty-five children's picture books originally published between 2010 and 2015. I revised a rubric by Menchetti, Plattos, and Carroll (2011) to use for my analysis. I noted continued disproportions between disability categories portrayed in books compared to those in the U.S. school population, recording particularly distinct discrepancies in the numbers of orthopedic impairments and specific learning disabilities. My findings confirm the notion developed among past researchers that the highest-quality portrayals are produced by authors and illustrators whose life experiences have given them informed perspectives from which to depict disability. I also discovered that award-winning texts including characters with disabilities do not always score highly on all measures of evaluation. I noted the ongoing tendency for stories to revolve around the disability, taking on a didactic quality. Conversely, my findings

indicate a greater prevalence in the number of characters with disabilities playing prominent story roles, as well as a perceived increase in the number of characters representing cultural diversity. An annotated bibliography at the conclusion of this piece lists eleven books with high-quality portrayals according to their rubric evaluations, as well as a few texts that fell below the selected criteria but still deserve recognition for their successes in depicting characters with disabilities.

More than a Wheelchair in the Background: A Study of Portrayals of Disabilities in
Children's Picture Books

Though often perceived as a simple genre, children's books can be meaningful outlets that reflect cultural climate and powerful tools that shape new attitudes. Historically, children's literature has been used as an avenue for education about diversity. Children's books have been instrumental in movements promoting equality for women and cultural minorities, and they have the potential to play a similar role today in promoting acceptance of disabilities (Brenna, 2008). Alternately, children's literature can introduce prejudiced ideas in a way that leads young minds to accept them as reality (Myers & Bersani, 2008). Like racism and sexism, attitudes that plague particular disadvantaged populations, ableism promotes the unfair treatment of people with disabilities fueled by prejudices of typically-developing individuals (Myers & Bersani, 2008). Today is a time of changing classroom cultures; the increase in efforts toward inclusion is placing students with and without disabilities more frequently in the same settings (Beckett, Ellison, Barrett, & Shah, 2010). This social shift presents a growing need for teachers and students to seek awareness and understanding of diversity (Beckett et al., 2010; Dyches, Prater, & Jenson, 2006).

Twenty percent of people in the United States have some type of disability, but children's literature does not represent this significant portion of the population accordingly (Hughes, 2012; Myers & Bersani, 2008). This dearth of portrayals conveys the message that people with disabilities are uninteresting and unworthy of including (Beckett et al., 2010). Children enjoy seeing characters that bear resemblance to them within stories, but twenty percent of the population may not have this opportunity unless

more positive texts that include characters with disabilities are introduced into the children's literature canon (Wopperer, 2011). The scarcity of texts including characters with disabilities may even be contributing to the lack of reading success among students with disabilities, even those with average or above-average IQs (Hughes, 2012). One study demonstrated that multiethnic students make gains in literacy when taught using multiethnic texts (Diamond & Moore, 1995). Perhaps the same could be true for students with disabilities.

Inclusion is essential in order to begin the process of combating negative attitudes about disabilities. According to Kendrick, "crucial to the move from segregation to integration is the evolution of a voice, because a voice implies significance: something to say, and a position from which to say it" (Kendrick, 2004). Children's books that include characters with disabilities can be invaluable tools for educating young children about disabilities, promoting attitudes of acceptance, and strengthening perceptions of self-worth both in typically-developing children and those with disabilities, when presented in the context of appropriate instruction and related activities (Altieri, 2008; Beckett et al., 2010; Curwood, 2013; Dyches et al., 2006; Golos, Moses, & Wolbers, 2012; Koc, Koc, & Ozdemir, 2010; Leininger, Dyches, Prater, & Heath, 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; McGrail & Rieger, 2014; Wopperer, 2011; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). It is especially important to help children develop awareness of the experiences of those with disabilities that are not visually apparent or that are often misunderstood (Matthew & Clow, 2007). Literature can be a tool that helps naturally initiate conversations about disabilities in the classroom (Iaquinta and Hipsky, 2006). Sharing inclusive books with children can even inspire authentic social change; exposure to inclusive texts can help typically-developing

students come to view peers with disabilities as friends (Trepanier-Street & Romantowski, 1996). According to Wopperer (2011), using children's books to meet educative goals closely aligns with the purposes of children's literature:

To entertain, to help children and young adults understand the world they live in, to help cope with problems they face, to introduce new places, ideas, or situations to its readers, to portray characters with whom readers can relate to better understand themselves (p. 26).

In addition to supporting children's emotional development, picture books containing positive portrayals of disabilities can also shape the attitudes of teachers, parents, and other caregivers who are exposed to these books through their work with children (Matthew & Clow, 2007). Teachers who are concerned that they do not have enough time to insert lessons on tolerance into their busy curricula should note that these types of lessons can be included in a language arts or social studies program or incorporated with the instruction of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Sotto & Ball, 2006).

Children's literature is a form of media for children, and when characters with disabilities are portrayed negatively, these attitudes become a part of children's collective consciousness (Sandefur & Moore, 2004). It is an issue more significant than just good books versus bad books; in the words of Salomon (1997), "media's symbolic forms of representation are clearly not neutral or indifferent packages that have no effect on the represented information" (p. 42). Attitudes conveyed in children's literature shape the attitudes that pervade our society, and vice versa (Sandefur & Moore, 2004).

Any texts that teachers present in the classroom should be examples of high-quality literature (Norton & Norton, 2002). It may be tempting to celebrate any book that portrays disability because of the relative paucity of such texts, but teachers should be intentional in exercising careful judgment when selecting books that include characters with disabilities (Myers & Bersani, 2008). Although there are no flawless criteria that can be used to identify positive portrayals, certain characteristics of the books need to be considered (Hughes, 2012). It is necessary to analyze illustrations in addition to text because the two can sometimes present conflicting messages (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Illustrations are an integral part of the messages conveyed; aesthetic experiences help readers draw the most meaning and emotional significance from stories (Rosenblatt, 1978).

My study summarizes and updates the body of research on the topic of portrayals of characters with disabilities in children's literature. First, I conducted a review of scholarly literature published between 2004 and 2014, combining the perspectives and findings of various studies to draw meaningful conclusions about current trends and how they developed. When selecting a window of publication years for the picture books I would evaluate, I scanned lists of books that were reviewed in previous studies. The book published most recently was a 2010 release (Moore & Littlewood, 2010), so I choose to review books published from 2010 through 2015. Using a revised version of a rubric by Menchetti et al. (2011), I evaluated the fifty-five children's picture books I collected and developed an annotated bibliography that includes descriptions of the books that scored highest on my rating scale.

I chose to evaluate only picture books, because I presumed they might be the most successful in shaping attitudes. They are introduced during early childhood, a period in which young minds might benefit most from exposure to new and positive perspectives. Koc et al. (2010) confirmed that “messages in children’s literature can make a significant contribution in the early development of attitudes of children” (p. 145). The process of developing a sense of self and building self-esteem begins between ages three and five, and children as young as three can be shaped by societal biases toward different types of diversity or messages passed on by people with whom they interact (Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos et al., 2012). My study is unique because it provides a focus on picture books and an analysis of all types of disabilities.

During the research I completed throughout this study, I came across the titles of children’s books I recalled enjoying as I child, *What’s Wrong with Timmy* (Shriver & Speidel, 2001) and *We’ll Paint the Octopus Red* (Stuve-Bodeen, 1998), among others. In hindsight, I recognize that these books formed some of the foundations of my early sensitivities to differences among people, particularly disabilities. This assumption is supported by Williams, who insists that reading inclusive texts can “build a foundation for acceptance” (Williams & Inkster, 2005).

Review of the Literature

Overview

Before considering the contributions of the past decade’s research on portrayals of disabilities in children’s literature, it is necessary to describe the context in which the conclusions were developed. The majority of researchers who studied this subject employed a qualitative or descriptive design, often a content analysis, (Beckett et al.,

2010; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches, Prater, & Leininger, 2009; Golos et al., 2012; Koc et al., 2010; Leininger et al., 2010; McGrail & Rieger, 2014) though some place more emphasis on the production of data from statistical analyses and coding techniques (Altieri, 2006; Golos & Moses, 2011; McGrail & Rieger, 2014; Park & Ostrosky, 2014). Most focus on children's texts in the realm of realistic fiction, those that present stories that could take place in today's world (Altieri, 2006, 2008; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Golos et al., 2012; Kendrick, 2004). Researchers adopted varying scopes for their projects: one study evaluated books published in the four previous years (Dyches et al., 2009), while another analyzed the publications from a nearly seventy year period (Dyches et al., 2006). Some selected ready availability as a requirement for their book selection (Beckett et al., 2010; Kunze, 2013), and others chose to include books no longer in print, because they may still maintain a presence in libraries and households and online (Altieri, 2006; Golos & Moses, 2011). Collectively, the scholarship of the past decade explores the representations of specific learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, communication disorders, physical disabilities, and sensory impairments, with some studies focusing on particular disabilities and others encompassing all. The body of research includes analyses of both picture books and novels.

History

Portrayals of disabilities in children's literature throughout the nineteenth century and a great deal of the twentieth century reflect the trite religious ideologies and social stigmas associated with disability in those periods of Western history. "The School of Pain" is a prevalent trope in many nineteenth century works, seen in stories in which a flawed or rebellious individual, often a girl, is reformed through suffering in the form of

physical limitation (Dowker, 2004; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). The Grimm brothers, among other authors, use disability as a metaphorical indicator of villainy or inferior character (Curwood, 2013; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Hughes, 2012), while others turn to the opposite extreme, creating caricatures of piety, joy, and resilience (Curwood, 2013; Dowker, 2004; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Wopperer, 2011). Though there were some improvements in quality as time progressed, works published in the twentieth century perpetuated troublesome story elements like the tendency for characters with disabilities to either recover through miraculous cures or be eliminated with untimely deaths (Dowker, 2004; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Wopperer, 2011). The common practice among twentieth century authors of revisiting traditional religious themes for the sake of sentimentality resulted in the sustaining of many negative literary trends past the time of their original popularity (Dowker, 2004). Though some researchers have noted complexities and nuances within this literary era that guard the portrayals found in its works from complete dismissal, (Beckett et al., 2010; Dowker, 2004), a 1977 study revealed that most publications up until that time indeed demonstrated a variety of stereotypes (Schwartz, 1977).

The advent of the Civil Rights Movement engendered an influx of books for children exploring themes of diversity, and representations of disability became more realistic as well as more numerous, though they remained far from perfect (Myers & Bersani, 2008; Wopperer, 2011). Quicke (1985) criticized the selection of books in the 1980s, decrying their poor literary quality as well as shallow characterizations. Koc et al. (2010) summarized studies conducted throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, concluding that books published in the last decades of the twentieth century continued to present

unacceptable depictions of disability. Dyches, Prater, and Cramer (2001) recorded some improvements in stories published just before the new millennium. Though a general improvement in quality can be noted across decades as ideologies evolved, it is important to realize that newer books are not inherently better; much still depends on each author's attitude and literary decisions (Kendrick, 2004).

Today, various initiatives established in the United Kingdom seek to draw attention to the important issue of portrayals of disability in children's literature. The U.K.'s "Invisible Children" conference in 1995, The Roald Dahl Foundation and Quentin Blake Awards' investigation and collaboration in 2005, the "In the Picture" project, the establishment of special awards honoring books with excellent portrayals, and the creation of teaching standards and school requirements that promote acceptance of diversity have contributed to improved awareness and the introduction of better literature (Altieri, 2008; Beckett et al., 2010; Kurts & Gavigan, 2008; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008).

Trends

It is necessary to reflect on trends in the inclusion of book characters with disabilities in order to celebrate and build on the progress that has been achieved and to address the many problems that remain. Researchers have generally recorded an increase in the number of books portraying disabilities being published each year and noted more positive characteristics in this body of literature with each of their subsequent studies, indicating that the size and quality of the collection is improving with time (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Leininger et al., 2010). Among books that portray disability, efforts have been made to include variety in the type of disability depicted, the

age of the characters, and the race or culture of the characters (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Worotyneć, 2004). Characters with disabilities can also be seen demonstrating more agency and participating more with peers in school and in the community (Dyches et al., 2009; Leininger et al., 2010). Koc et al. (2010) define positivity as the rule rather than the exception, with 63% of the portrayals they analyzed identified as positive compared to 24% negative and 13% mixed or neutral. Other research has classified an even greater percentage of portrayals as positive (84%) and underscored the trend of improvements with time by describing an increase in average rating score between books published 1975-1990 and those published in 1991-2009 (Leininger et al., 2010).

Most authors who enter this area of study acknowledge the relative dearth of portrayals of disability in the children's literature canon (Golos & Moses, 2011; Matthew & Clow, 2007). Worotyneć (2004) examined children's book lists from notable organizations and reports that the list from the New York Public Library (NYPL) entitled "100 Picture Books Everyone Should Know" includes some titles promoting cultural diversity, but none in which disability is represented. The list, "Children's Books about Disabilities" from the Educational Resources and Information Center Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (ERIC), offers no great reassurance, as Worotyneć (2004) found many of these recommended books "so contrived as to be offensive." Indeed, the type of literature that adopts disability as the central theme frequently assumes a tone of didacticism that diminishes its quality (Kendrick, 2004). Perhaps fortunately, then, it is becoming more common for disability to be a secondary element of the story, sometimes shaping the plot but not serving as the central focus (Matthew & Clow, 2007; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006; Wopperer, 2011). It has been noted that

in some cases quality books are produced by small publishing houses in partnership with charitable organizations, but few of these books are in print and readily accessible to readers (Favazza, LaRoe, Phillipsen, & Kumar, 2000; Walker, 2001).

Biographies of individuals with disabilities are common, such as the plethora of stories about Helen Keller, but these often overemphasize and sentimentalize disability without exploring the depth of a person's personality, life experience, and contributions (Dyches et al., 2006; Hughes, 2012; Kunze, 2013).

It is uncommon for the character with a disability to fill the role of protagonist (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Kendrick, 2004; Matthew & Clow, 2007). While a broader range of disabilities is being depicted in children's books today, some are appearing in numbers disproportionate to their prevalence documented among students in U.S. schools (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Konrad, Helf, & Itoi, 2007). Similarly, the ratio of male characters with particular disabilities compared to female characters often does not reflect true ratios of occurrence, frequently over representing the male population (Altieri, 2006; Dyches & Prater, 2005). Characters with disabilities who represent diverse cultures are not sufficiently prevalent in children's literature; researchers have proffered that the level of diversity in books should mirror the true levels of minority populations in our society (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos et al., 2012; Konrad et al., 2007). Books containing culturally diverse characters with disabilities sometimes miss opportunities to create accurate and meaningful depictions of particular cultural experiences (Altieri, 2006; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos et al., 2012). This can perhaps be attributed to an outside-looking-in perspective among authors; the majority of children's writers do not come from minority cultures or have direct experience with

disability (Golos et al., 2012; Myers & Bersani, 2008). Negative interactions and poor educational experiences often shape portrayals of characters with learning disabilities, as evidenced by Altieri's (2008) study on negative characterizations of teachers. Although unfavorable representations of teachers are unfortunately common throughout children's literature in general (Sandefur & Moore, 2004), the lack of caring and capable teachers in books including characters with disabilities presents particularly disheartening implications about how these students are educated (Altieri, 2008). Multiple researchers who evaluated books containing characters with disabilities found that many portrayals depicted stereotypes, insufficient character development, inappropriate educational practice, and negative attitudes (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Golos & Moses, 2011; Konrad et al., 2007). Unfortunately, skewed proportions and unfavorable messages can even be found in highly acclaimed books such as Newbery and Caldecott award recipients (Hughes, 2012). Leininger and colleagues (2010) list percent distributions of all of the IDEA disability categories represented in Newbery Award or Honor books, with the exception of traumatic brain injury, which was not represented in any of the titles. The disabilities most often explored through this acclaimed collection of children's literature include orthopedic impairments, emotional/behavioral disorders, and intellectual disabilities, while the two least common are deaf-blindness and developmental delays (Leininger et al., 2010). Several disability categories are overrepresented in Newbery Award and Honor books compared with the percentage of occurrence in schools today, while others are not represented enough to be an accurate reflection of the student population (Leininger et al., 2010). Those overrepresented include orthopedic impairments, intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, autism, hearing impairments,

and developmental delays, and those underrepresented include specific learning disabilities, other health impairments, and speech/language impairments (Leininger et al., 2010). Emotional/behavioral disorders are portrayed in relative proportion to their true level of occurrence (Leininger et al., 2010).

The frequency in which a particular disability is portrayed in children's books is perhaps less significant than the quality of those portrayals. Leininger and colleagues also review the quality of disability representations in each of the different categories (Leininger et al., 2010). Specific learning disabilities and visual impairments receive the highest ratings, while intellectual disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders earned the lowest scores (Leininger et al., 2010). The majority of the Newbery Award and Honor books studied have plots that center on the disability of the character; only a few included a character who shaped the plot but whose disability did not affect the storyline (Leininger et al., 2010).

In recent years a new school of thought has emerged that rejects disability as a strictly medical phenomenon, instead classifying it as the distinguishing element of a unique culture, only perceived as negative because of the limitations of society (Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos et al., 2012; Kunze, 2013; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). With this attitude disability becomes an integral but positive feature of an individual's identity (Swain & French, 2000). This perspective, known as the social model of disability (Beckett et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Kunze, 2013), the anti-disablist approach (Beckett et al., 2010), or the affirmation model (Hughes, 2012), has introduced new criteria to consider when evaluating children's books that include characters with disabilities. Many children's books include ideology from the conflicting

medical approach, though support is growing for the cultural model and some books reflect this shift (Golos & Moses, 2011).

Criteria Used for Determining Quality

The body of recent research has proposed a number of criteria for selecting and evaluating children's books on the quality of their depictions of disability. Stories as well as illustrations are subject to analysis in the framework of multiple studies (Dyches et al., 2009; Koc et al., 2010; Konrad et al., 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater et al., 2006). Prater and Dyches (2008) examined the quality of each as specific entities apart from the quality of the books' disability portrayals. Quicke (1985) emphasizes the importance of representing physical appearance and behaviors correctly and respectfully and creating a generally optimistic tone through stories that still reflect realism, and later professionals echo his conclusions (McGovern, 2014; Prater & Dyches, 2008). Themes of characterization, relationships with other characters, the level in which characters grow and change, and features of good practice within the field of special education formed the basis of other analyses (Altieri, 2008; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Golos & Moses, 2011; Kurtts & Gavigan, 2008; Prater & Dyches, 2008; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). Writings from Altieri and other researchers declare that when selecting a book it is important to question the terminology used in descriptions of the disability and whether the character's disability is quickly resolved or if it is explained as an ongoing challenge (Altieri, 2008; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Koc et al., 2010; Konrad et al., 2007; Rhiger, 2011). Additionally, researchers suggest the examination of author's backgrounds, characters' demographic profiles, power dynamics within relationships, and who functions as "heroes" in each story (Curwood, 2013; Golos & Moses, 2011; Konrad et al.,

2007; Rhiger, 2011; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). For supporters of the social model of disability, in which the barriers facing individuals with disabilities are associated with societal limits rather than biological factors, it is essential that the reflection of that perspective be included in book selection criteria (Beckett et al., 2010). Though seeking positive representations is the aim of most researchers of this subject, some explain that they would choose not to dismiss books containing unfavorable portrayals, retaining them for their potential value as teaching tools (Prater et al., 2006).

Negative Portrayals of Disabilities

Though each researcher presents unique ideas and focuses on particular literary elements, a general consensus can be drawn about what separates a positive portrayal of disability from one that is unfavorable. Firstly, texts that contain stereotyped representations of disability are designated as inappropriate (Beckett et al., 2010; Brenna, 2008; Dowker, 2004; Hughes, 2012; Myers & Bersani, 2008). In keeping with the social or cultural model of disability, negative portrayals might also place emphasis on biological barriers of disability rather than those imposed by society (Beckett et al., 2010; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos et al., 2012; Hughes, 2012; Kunze, 2013).

The critical reader should next consider the role the character with a disability fills in the narrative. In negative portrayals characters are victimized, dependent, or objects of pity (Beckett et al., 2010; Brenna, 2008; Dyches et al., 2009; Golos et al., 2012; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Koc et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Sotto & Ball, 2006; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). They might also serve only as examples of perseverance or function only to initiate the development of an able-bodied character (Beckett et al., 2010; Dowker, 2004; Kendrick, 2004; Kunze, 2013; Leininger

et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Wopperer, 2011; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). The tendency for typically-developing characters to act as the leaders, problem-solvers, role models, and heroes continually relegates those with disabilities to subsidiary or inferior roles (Brenna, 2008; Hughes, 2012; Koc et al., 2010; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Sotto & Ball, 2006; Worotyneec, 2004).

Another common characteristic of negative portrayals is the trope in which characters with disabilities are granted nearly superhuman attributes, seemingly in an attempt to compensate for their impairments (Dyches et al., 2009; Koc et al., 2010; Kunze, 2013; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). Multiple professionals also agree that it is inappropriate for a character with a disability to be restored through a miracle cure (Beckett et al., 2010; Dowker, 2004; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Leininger et al., 2010; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011).

Positive Portrayals of Disabilities

In addition to listing story elements that form negative representations of disability, researchers have named features that contribute to positive characterizations. The most commonly noted quality of characters that are portrayed favorably is complexity; it is essential that characters be afforded the dignity of depth and the freedom to evolve (Altieri, 2006; Beckett et al., 2010; Brenna, 2008; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Koc et al., 2010; Konrad et al., 2007; Kunze, 2013; Leininger et al., 2010; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater et al., 2006; Sotto & Ball, 2006; Wopperer, 2011). In positive portrayals characters with disabilities are described as individuals with unique personalities and interests (Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Koc et al., 2010; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater et al., 2006; Wopperer, 2011;

Woroty nec, 2004). They are not defined by disability (Beckett et al., 2010; Dowker, 2004; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Hughes, 2012; Koc et al., 2010; Kunze, 2013; McGrail & Rieger, 2014; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater et al., 2006), and focus centers on strengths and abilities rather than impairments (Brenna, 2008; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Leininger et al., 2010; Prater et al., 2006).

Researchers overwhelmingly insist that children's book portrayals of disability must be accurate and realistic in order to be acceptable (Beckett et al., 2010; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Kendrick, 2004; Koc et al., 2010; Konrad et al., 2007; Leininger et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Prater et al., 2006; Wopperer, 2011). Many researchers value the quality and accuracy of illustrations as well; it is essential that images of characters with disabilities be free of stereotypes and accompanied by positive physical descriptions within the text (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2006; Dyches et al., 2009; Kendrick, 2004; Kunze, 2013; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater et al., 2006; Wopperer, 2011; Woroty nec, 2004). Authors succeed when they accurately reflect the ethnic diversity of the population of individuals with disabilities, crafting stories that include characters from a variety of backgrounds and providing detailed illustrations of the diverse cultures throughout each storyline (Altieri, 2006; Dyches et al., 2009; Leininger et al., 2010; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater et al., 2006). Characters with disabilities should fill diverse roles, serving as leaders, problem solvers, role models, helpers, and heroes (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Hughes, 2012; Koc et al., 2010; Leininger et al., 2010; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Prater et al., 2006; Sotto & Ball, 2006; Wopperer, 2011; Woroty nec, 2004). Texts including positive characterizations show characters with disabilities exercising agency, making independent choices, and

demonstrating self-determination (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Leininger et al., 2010). Stories should depict the appropriate inclusion of individuals with disabilities in society; they should be granted all rights of citizens and met with attitudes of acceptance (Beckett et al., 2010; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2009; Kendrick, 2004; Leininger et al., 2010).

Conclusions and Calls for Action

The last decade of research on portrayals of disabilities in children's literature has developed stirring conclusions about the current selection of texts. A survey conducted by Matthew and Clow (2007) questioned parents of children with disabilities about their reading experiences with their children. Parents reported sharing books with their children and observing their children responding to and drawing meaning from the images they saw (Matthew & Clow, 2007). Parents expressed disappointment in the limited selection of children's books that include characters with disabilities (Matthew & Clow, 2007). Beckett and colleagues (2010) suggest that now is the time to take action; movements to increase inclusion in schools and requirements for supporting diversity and acceptance in the classroom have created a social climate primed for change in the realms of children's literature and education.

Researchers in the field call for change, imploring teachers and families to stock their personal libraries with inclusive children's texts and to request increased publication from key players in the children's literature industry (Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008). These books need not assign disability as the central plot focus or endeavor to educate the public through non-fiction accounts, and they should not be isolated in separate sections of the library (Matthew & Clow, 2007; Wopperer, 2011).

Rather, the subtle inclusion of characters with disabilities should be a regular feature of the children's literature collection as a whole, simply a reflection of our diverse society (Leininger et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007).

After analyzing the results from their study of Newbery Award and Honor recipients, Leininger and colleagues (2010) call for several improvements to the body of literature including characters with disabilities. Books should more frequently include characters with disabilities who also represent cultural and linguistic minorities (Leininger et al., 2010). It is important that authors assign more characters with disabilities to protagonist roles and choose to narrate from their points of view (Leininger et al., 2010). Frequently-occurring disabilities need to constitute a more significant presence in the body of literature, and biases that have led to more negative portrayals of particular disabilities must be terminated (Leininger et al., 2010). Dyches, Prater, and Leininger (2009) noted the need for more appropriate and realistic portrayals of intellectual and developmental disabilities and for opportunities for characters to demonstrate self-determination. McGovern (2014) requests a commitment to realism and greater complexity in portrayals of the disability experience, also expressing an interest in more books that include characters with severe disabilities. She calls for an element of universal relatability, for appealing storylines that will attract all types of readers (McGovern, 2014).

Many researchers stress the importance of developing characters with disabilities through thoroughly positive portrayals. However, as awareness grows and literary practices improve, illustrator Jane Ray insists that the pursuit of perfection must not discourage authors from attempting the task (Matthew & Clow, 2007, p. 72). In her

words, "...we are paralyzed by the fear of causing offense, of somehow making it worse. But what could possibly be worse for a child than not being included, being ignored, having your very existence denied?" (Matthew & Clow, 2007). It is essential that characters with disabilities become a regular feature in children's literature narratives and images, and authors must diligently sustain efforts to improve the quality of portrayals so that characters may become strong role models rather than passive participants.

Methodology

Gathering Past Research

My first step in conducting this project involved surveying past research on the topic of portrayals of disabilities in children's literature. Library databases from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga served as my primary source for locating relevant scholarship. I combed databases that include research in the fields of Education, English, and Children's Literature to find resources relevant to this multidisciplinary topic. The databases I reviewed included Education Full Text, Children's Literature Review, Dissertations and Theses, MLA International Biography, and Project MUSE. I used Google Scholar as an additional resource for locating sources of past research. I chose the terms *children's literature*, *picture books for children*, *disabilities*, the root word *disab**, *content analysis*, *content analysis of children's literature*, *portrayals of disabilities*, *representations of disabilities*, *portrayals of disabilities in children's picture books*, *representations of disabilities in children's literature*, *disabilities in children's literature*, and *disabilities in children's picture books* for conducting searches.

I studied peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2004 and 2014, the ten-year span preceding the beginning of my project. I read the titles and abstracts of the

articles that emerged from my searches, compiling those that are most relevant to the goals of my project. I eliminated articles if they focus solely on novels or young adult literature or if they examine a particular aspect of the texts (e.g., mother-child relationships in books including characters with disabilities) rather than evaluating the general quality of disability portrayals.

The remaining collection of thirty-one articles serves as the body of research that I describe in my literature review. I also rely on the research publications of the past decade to support my claims and decision-making measures throughout the span of this study. The set of articles includes earlier literature reviews of research on portrayals of disabilities in children's literature, as well as reports of notable studies conducted on this topic. Scholarship from the years 2004 through 2014 comprises the majority of research I discuss, but I cited earlier works if I found them to be the original sources of information I gathered from the 2004-2014 articles.

Selecting Children's Books to Review

To begin the next section of my project, my evaluation of recent children's picture books containing characters with disabilities, I reviewed lists of recipients of relevant literary awards and conducted Internet searches in order to develop a subset of picture books that would be the subject of my analysis. A picture book is defined as a short book intended for a child audience (ages 0-14) that creates a visual experience through words and pictures integrated to present a particular story-line, theme, or concept (Prater et al., 2006). I chose to include picture books between 20 and 40 pages in length, originally published between 2010 and 2015, and currently in print as traditional books. I did not include e-books in my study.

I included books portraying characters with any of the thirteen types of disabilities defined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). I excluded portrayals of psychiatric illness, temporary medical illness or injury, and conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder or Alzheimer's disease. I did not include books that emerged in my search results if their descriptions on Amazon did not indicate that any character has a disability. I excluded books of the self-help variety and those with titles that might deter typically-developing children from reading, such as "a book for children with autism" or "a story for kids with ADHD." For this study I also chose to exclude biographies, true stories about well-known figures, and strictly informational books written for the purpose of educating readers about disabilities. If I found a book to be one of multiple in a series or one by an author who had written others including the same characters, I chose to only review one book from the collection.

I began my book search by searching for recipients of the Schneider Family Book Award and the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award. Since 2004, the Schneider Family Book Award has been issued annually by the American Library Association to an author or illustrator who presents "an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences" (American Library Association, 2012). I included all the books that received awards in the *Children's Book* category and met the other criteria I chose for book selection. The Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award is presented biennially by the Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children, in conjunction with the Special Needs Project. Beginning in 2000, this recognition has been granted to picture books and chapter books presenting

“effective, enlightened portrayals of individuals with developmental disabilities”

(Council for Exceptional Children – Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 2012). I included picture books that were Dolly Gray recipients on my list if they met the other criteria for my book selection.

Following my review of these award lists, I conducted subject-specific searches on Amazon and Follett Titlewave. On Amazon, I reviewed the set of one-hundred bestselling books on Amazon’s list “Children’s Special Need Books” and conducted searches with the terms *picture books with characters with disabilities* and *picture books + disabilities*. Next I conducted a search of the Follett Titlewave site, using the keywords *picture books with characters with disabilities*, *characters with disabilities*, and *disabilities*. The site allowed me to refine my search by selecting the publication years 2010-2015, the interest levels *Kindergarten-3* and *Grades 3-6*, English as the text language, and the number of pages ranging from 20 to 40.

I obtained the books for review through the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga’s Interlibrary Loan program and through purchase via Amazon. I eliminated a few books that could not be obtained with ease due to limited availability and international shipping difficulties. My final list of books includes fifty-five titles.

Method of Evaluation

The tool I selected for evaluating the quality of portrayals of disabilities in picture books published between 2010 and 2015 is a revised version of a rubric developed by Menchetti, Plottos, and Carroll (2011). The checklist was published in the article “The Impact of Fiction on Perceptions of Disability” from a 2011 issue of *The Alan Review*, a publication of the National Council of Teachers of English (Menchetti et al., 2011). It

was developed for the task of evaluating the quality of portrayals of disability in fiction novels for adolescents and young adults (Menchetti et al., 2011). This detailed scale includes items for evaluation that align with many of the principles addressed by research authors I studied when conducting my literature review. The scale's specific explanations of criteria and rating scale format with *Yes/No/Unsure* options distinguish it as an appropriate tool for the thorough evaluation of books within a relatively short period.

I made adjustments to the criteria specified in the scale to develop a rubric that is appropriate for the evaluation of children's picture books and in keeping with the currently accepted terminology for disabilities. I also added or adjusted phrases to reflect the evaluation criteria recommended by previous researchers included in my literature review. I created four new items to include in my revised scale after making note of criteria items previous researchers discussed that were not represented in the rubric.

In order to ease the process of data collection, I added rows at the top of the scale where I could make note of the disability portrayed in a book, the age of the character, and the sex of the character. I also changed the *Unsure* option on the rating column to *Unsure or Mixed*. I thought it was likely that many of the children's books I would review might include mixed features that could not accurately be reflected in *Yes* or *No* responses. For example, the character with a disability may be introduced as self-conscious and unhappy before an experience gives them renewed self-esteem. A text like this would receive a *Mixed* rating for the item about confidence. I also added a rating option of *N/A*. I foresaw this option being an appropriate response on certain items for books that do not make any explicit reference to a character's disability. When the disability is revealed only through illustrations or included naturally without

announcement, a response of *Yes* on items about using person-first language and appropriate terms to name the disability would not be accurate. The *N/A* option allowed me to record these situations appropriately while avoiding penalizing a text for what can be a thoroughly positive approach. All of my changes to the rubric can be found in Appendix A.

Findings

Publication Data

I reviewed copyright pages and Amazon product descriptions to determine countries of publication for each picture book I evaluated. Having noticed that there seemed to be several texts that feature the culture and vernacular of Great Britain, I wondered if there is indeed a significant proportion of books published there, a trend that might be attributed to the In the Picture project and other initiatives established in the United Kingdom with the goals of promoting the inclusion of characters with disabilities in children's literature and increasing tolerance of diversity through various means (Altieri, 2008; Beckett et al., 2010; Kurts & Gavigan, 2008; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008). It was difficult to isolate lists of texts originally published in the UK and in the United States because publications sometimes occur simultaneously or within a year of each other and books are often produced in multiple cities or countries at once. Texts published outside the U.S. may have also not surfaced as easily in my searches. More thorough research would be required to determine more accurate and conclusive results. My calculations indicate that most of the picture books I included in my study ($n=44$, 80%) were published in the United States, with several, but not a significant proportion ($n=7$, 13%) originating in the UK and a few ($n=4$, 7%) published in

additional countries including Canada, South Africa, India, and Japan. Determining these figures was complicated by the prevalence of online publications and self-publications.

Past researchers on the subject of portrayals of disabilities in children's literature have noted that these texts are often not published by large-scale publication companies because of concern that they will not warrant successful sales. Instead, they are often produced by charitable organizations or smaller publication houses (Matthew & Clow, 2007; Wopperer, 2011). I found this to be true of the books I compiled for my study; there are few recognizable names in children's literature publication found among the picture books I reviewed. My lack of expert understanding of the publishing industry prevented me from making more accurate claims on this topic, but I determined that at least fifteen percent of the books I evaluated are products of small publishing houses, charitable organizations, or most prominently, online or self-publications.

Character Demographics and Disability Categories Portrayed

The collection of texts I compiled from the years 2010 through 2015 includes fifty-five picture books and a total of sixty-six different characters with disabilities. The majority of these characters are children ($n=43$, 65%), but a few adults ($n=8$, 12%) and teenagers ($n=3$, 5%) are depicted as well, usually in the context of close relation to a child protagonist, such as a parent or sibling. In certain cases ($n=6$, 9%) I was unable to determine the age of a character because the character is an animal or his persona is otherwise ambiguous. There are also a few texts ($n=6$, 9%) in which the story follows a character from childhood into teenage years or adulthood, so I assigned these to a separate category.

During my evaluation process I recorded which disabilities are portrayed in each text. For ease of analysis and relevance of data comparison, I then adjusted my labels to match the disability categories that qualify for services under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). My judgments about which characters should be assigned to which disability categories operated under the assumption that the characters would receive services under those categories if they were between the ages of 3 and 21 and being educated in a public school setting (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). I based my classifications on the definitions of each disability specified by IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In many cases, authors do not specify the type of disability being portrayed, so I made decisions based on these definitions and my knowledge acquired through pre-service teacher education. Therefore, it is possible that some of the categories I selected do not align with those the authors would have intended. When disabilities are revealed almost entirely through illustrations, I selected the category of the disability visually apparent, though the possibility exists that the character could have multiple disabilities. My findings can be found in Table 1 below. Orthopedic impairments are depicted most frequently by far, followed by visual impairments and autism.

Table 1. Distribution of Characters by IDEA Disability Categories

Disability Category	Number of Characters	Distribution of Sexes	
		Male	Female
Autism	8	7	1
Deaf-Blindness	0	0	0
Deafness	3	0	3
Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	0	0	0
Hearing Impairment	2	2	0
Intellectual Disability	2	1	1
Multiple Disabilities	6	1	5
Orthopedic Impairment	23	12	11
Other Health Impairment	5	1	4
Specific Learning Disability	5	4	1
Speech or Language Impairment	2	2	0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0	0
Visual Impairment	10	5	5

In order to determine if different types of disabilities are represented proportionally to the occurrence of those disabilities in the U.S. school population, I compared my findings to data published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). There is some discrepancy between the disability categories found on this site and those listed under IDEA. The majority of categories are listed by both sources, but NCES includes the category of *developmental delay* while IDEA does not. IDEA distinguishes *Deafness* as a category independent of *Hearing Impairment*, while the two are combined by NCES (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). I did not include the *developmental delay* category when I recorded data from the picture books, so I omitted that category from the NCES list when making my comparisons. I combined my data under the *deafness* and *hearing impairment* categories so they could be more readily compared to NCES statistics. Figure 1 depicts the percentage of occurrence of

each disability category in the picture books I analyzed compared to their occurrence in the U.S. population. Table 2 displays the numerical data that is illustrated in Figure 1.

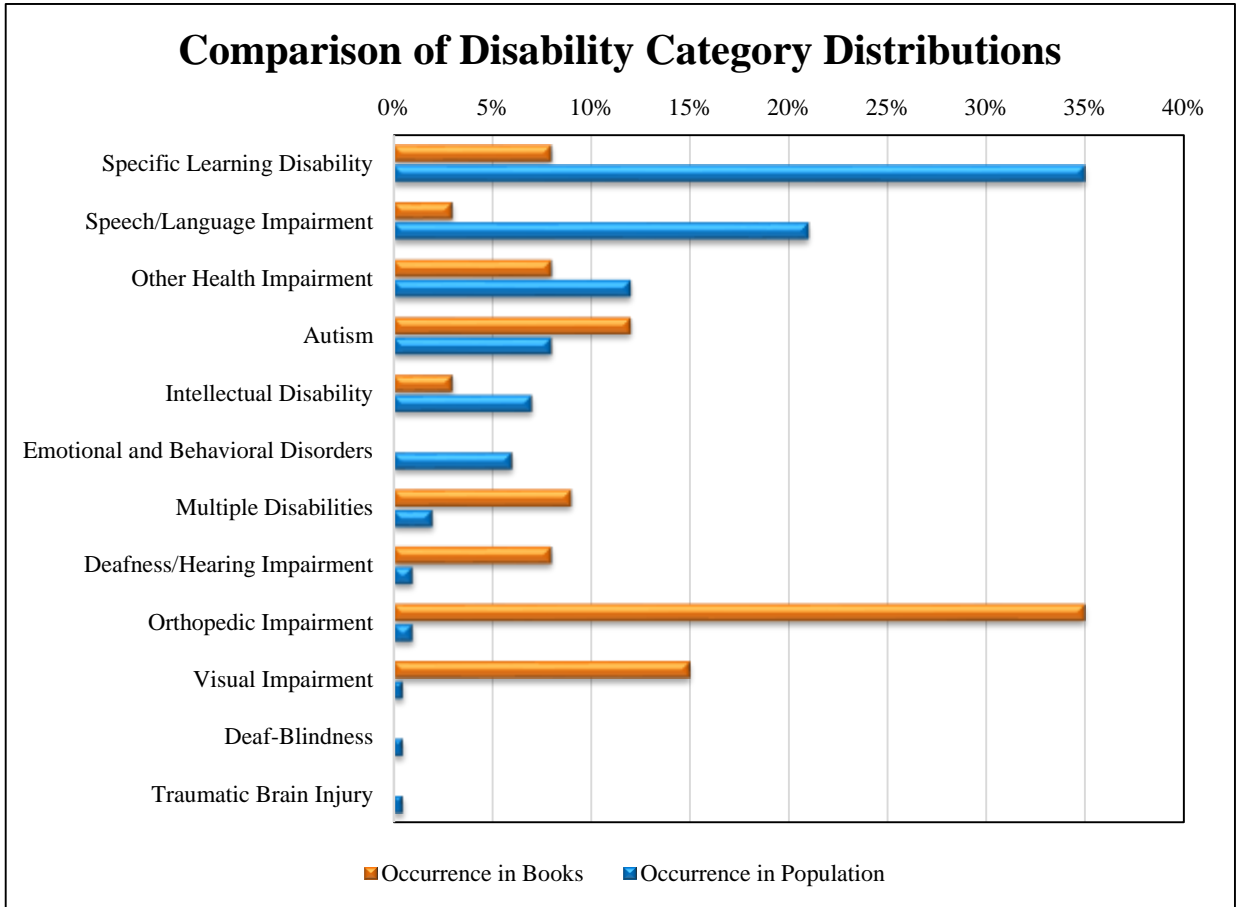


Figure 1.

Table 2. Comparison of Disability Category Distributions

Disability Category	Occurrence in Books	Occurrence in Population
Specific Learning Disability	<i>n</i> =5, 8%	35%
Speech/Language Impairment	<i>n</i> =2, 3%	21%
Other Health Impairment	<i>n</i> =5, 8%	12%
Autism	<i>n</i> =8, 12%	8%
Intellectual Disability	<i>n</i> =2, 3%	7%
Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	<i>n</i> =0, 0%	6%
Multiple Disabilities	<i>n</i> =6, 9%	2%
Deafness/Hearing Impairment	<i>n</i> =5, 8%	1%
Orthopedic Impairment	<i>n</i> =23, 35%	1%
Visual Impairment	<i>n</i> =10, 15%	less than 0.5%
Deaf-Blindness	<i>n</i> =0, 0%	less than 0.5%
Traumatic Brain Injury	<i>n</i> =0, 0%	less than 0.5%

The frequency in which certain disability categories are portrayed in children's literature does not accurately reflect national statistics on the occurrence of these disabilities within the U.S. school population. Orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, deafness/hearing impairments, multiple disabilities, and autism are overrepresented in picture books compared to the actual prevalence of these disabilities in the population. Specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, emotional and behavioral disorders, intellectual disabilities, and other health impairments are underrepresented, not appearing frequently enough in children's literature to accurately reflect rates of occurrence in the population. Deaf-blindness and traumatic brain injuries are not portrayed in any of the picture books I reviewed, but these disabilities occur so rarely in the U.S. school population (both less than 0.5% of student receiving services) that this absence was not startling.

A fairly even number of male and female characters are portrayed as characters with disabilities in picture books, with a total of thirty-five (53%) males and thirty-one (47%) females. It is appropriate that there are a greater number of male characters with autism than female characters, because a higher prevalence of diagnoses among males has been documented (Autism Speaks Inc., 2015). However, it seems that the gap between the sexes is exaggerated when portrayed in children's picture books. There are seven times as many male characters with autism than there are female characters, but the true proportion is 4.5 to 1. Beyond this, it was not possible to determine if the sex distributions in each disability category are consistent with the distributions found in the U.S. school population, because data disaggregated by disability and sex and produced do not seem to have been published at the national level in recent years.

Scores and Features of Highest- and Lowest-Scoring Texts

I evaluated the fifty-five picture books I compiled through my book search using the Menchetti et al. rubric I adopted and revised (Menchetti et al., 2011). I awarded one point for each *Yes* response and deducted one point for each *No* response. I considered both *Yes* and *No* responses in order to produce more complete results that would celebrate books' good qualities while recognizing areas where they could improve. Books received no points or deductions for responses of *Unsure or Mixed* or *N/A*. After evaluating each book using the rubric, I then compiled a list of the picture books in rank order according to their scores. Tables 3 and 4 below display the highest-scoring and lowest-scoring texts, respectively. I included the top ten and bottom ten books, though my high-scoring list is actually a list of eleven because of tied scores. Books are marked with the same order number if they received identical scores to avoid unintentional ordering. For example, *The Art of Miss Chew* and *Lilliana Grows it Green* are both marked as number 2 in Table 3 because both received scores of 36. An ordered list of all fifty-five books can be found in Appendix B.

Table 3. Highest-Scoring Books (according to revised Menchetti et al. rubric)

	Book Title	Author & Illustrator	Does author and/or illustrator have past or current significant experience with disabilities?	Publication Year	Disability Portrayed	Awards Won	Score Received
1.	<i>King for a Day</i>	Rukhsana Khan & Christiane Krömer	No	2013	Orthopedic impairment		37
2.	<i>The Art of Miss Chew</i>	Patricia Polacco	Yes	2012	Specific learning disability		36
2.	<i>Lilliana Grows it Green</i>	Amy Carpenter Leugs & Heather Newman	No	2012	Autism		36
3.	<i>My Name is Blessing</i>	Eric Walters & Eugenie Fernandes	Yes	2013	Orthopedic impairment		33
3.	<i>My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay</i>	Cari Best & Vanessa Brantley-Newton	Yes	2015	Visual impairment		33
4.	<i>The Boy Who Learned Upside Down</i>	Christy Scattarella & Winky Wheeler	Yes	2013	Specific learning disability		32
4.	<i>Jacob's Eye Patch</i>	Beth Kobliner Shaw, Jacob Shaw, and Jules Feiffer	Yes	2013	Visual impairment		32
5.	<i>Sienna's Locket</i>	Chrissy Bernal & Darcy White	Yes	2010	Multiple disabilities		31
5.	<i>How to Roll Like Chris P. Bacon</i>	Len Lucero, Kristina Tracy, and Penny Weber	Yes	2014	Orthopedic impairment		31
5.	<i>My Brother Charlie</i>	Holly Robinson Peete, Ryan Elizabeth Peete, Denene Millner, and Shane W. Evans	Yes	2010	Autism	Dolly Gray Award	31
5.	<i>The First Day Speech</i>	Isabelle Hadala & José Pardo	Yes	2012	Speech or language impairment		31

Table 4. Lowest-Scoring Books (according to revised Menchetti et al. rubric)

	Book Title	Author & Illustrator	Does author and/or illustrator have past or current significant experience with disabilities?	Publication Year	Disability Portrayed	Awards Won	Score Received
1.	<i>Poor William Dill</i>	Marcia Mostoller	Yes	2011	Other health impairment		6
1.	<i>Rolling with Life</i>	Jeralyn Barta & Harriet Briseno	Yes	2010	Orthopedic impairment		6
2.	<i>The Lemonade Ripple: A Sweet Story of Kindness and Charity</i>	Paul Reichert	No	2012	Orthopedic impairment		7
3.	<i>Invizy & the Misfit Supers</i>	Scott Wiser	No	2012	More than one character with disabilities		8
4.	<i>Bailey Enjoys His First Holiday Season</i>	Ann Devine Ferreira	Yes	2011	Autism		10
5.	<i>My Friend Suhana</i>	Shaila Abdullah & Aanyah Abdullah	Yes	2014	Orthopedic impairment		11
6.	<i>The King of Fish</i>	Darrell House & Patti Argoff	No	2011	Orthopedic impairment		12
6.	<i>Blueberry Lu</i>	Lisa Goff & Jasmine Mills	Yes	2015	Orthopedic impairment		12
6.	<i>The Little Potcakes</i>	Camy De Mario & Karen Hastings	No	2013	Orthopedic impairment		12
6.	<i>Dachy's Deaf</i>	Jack Hughes	No	2015	Hearing impairment		12

I included additional columns in Tables 3 and 4 to display other characteristics of these highest-scoring and lowest-scoring texts. Researchers suggest that it is best when authors of texts that include characters with disabilities offer an informed perspective

stemming from personal experience with disability or familiarity developed from working or living closely with individuals who have disabilities (Konrad et al., 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008). I studied author and illustrator profiles printed on book jackets, back covers, or special pages within the picture books for indicators of informed backgrounds. If no profiles were provided, I located Internet sites for those authors and illustrators that included personal information. This cursory search may not have yielded entirely accurate results, for there may be a case in which an author has personal experience with disabilities but chooses not to include it in her profile. As they are, my findings indicate that there is some weight to claims about the importance of an informed perspective. A large portion ($n=9$, 82%) of the eleven highest-scoring texts were produced by authors and illustrators with personal connection to a disability experience, whereas only half ($n=5$, 50%) of the ten lowest-scoring texts were produced by individuals with a relevant background.

I thought it would be worthwhile to consider if my most positive books were published most recently and my least positive books were published in the earliest years of my selected publication window, given that later copyright dates alone sometimes indicate that portrayals of disabilities will be more appropriate than those featured in older texts (Konrad et al., 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008). Such a trend is not apparent in my results; both my highest-scoring book list and my lowest-scoring book list include texts published in nearly every year of my selected publication window.

A previous study determined which individual disability categories were portrayed most positively and most negatively when depicted in children's literature (Leininger et al., 2010). Specific learning disability and visual impairments earned the

highest scores for quality of portrayals, while intellectual disability and emotional and behavioral disorders earned the lowest (Leininger et al., 2010). I analyzed my results to determine if the same trends can be viewed in this study. Six different disability categories are featured in the list of the eleven highest-scoring books: orthopedic impairment, specific learning disability, autism, visual impairment, multiple disabilities, and speech or language impairment. Four categories are depicted among the ten lowest-scoring texts: other health impairment, orthopedic impairment, autism, and hearing impairment. There do not seem to be any significant results indicating that certain disabilities receive more positive characterizations, as no single disability category dominates either list. The same disability category, orthopedic impairment, is found most frequently on both lists, which I imagine is simply a result of the overall frequency of this category's appearance in children's picture books.

One might expect Schneider Family Book Award- and Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award-winning texts to earn top spots on any list featuring high-quality books that include characters with disabilities (American Library Association, 2012; Council for Exceptional Children – Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 2012). A "top 25" list compiled in 2008 included five recipients of these awards, comprising 20% of the total list (Prater & Dyches, 2008). Though I reviewed three Schneider Family Book Award winners and two Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award recipients, only one of these texts, *My Brother Charlie*, can be found in my set of the highest-scoring eleven books (H. R. Peete, R. E. Peete, Millner, & Evans, 2010).

Rubric Item Analysis

After reviewing all fifty-five picture books using the revised Menchetti et al. (2011) rubric, I calculated the number of books that earned *Yes*, *No*, *Unsure or Mixed*, and *N/A* responses on each item. I compiled all these results in a document that can be found in Appendix C. If seventy-five percent or more ($n=41$ or more) books earned *Yes* responses on a particular item, I concluded that the condition described in that item was sufficiently met in the collection of children's picture books published between 2010 and 2015. Alternately, if only twenty-five percent ($n=14$) or fewer books earned *Yes* responses on a particular item, I concluded that the condition described in that item was not sufficiently met in the collection. Below, Table 5 lists the criteria that the majority of books meet, along with the number of *Yes* ratings earned, and Table 6 lists the criteria that the majority of books did not meet, along with the number of *Yes* ratings earned.

Table 5. Items Earning 75% or More (n=41 or more) Yes Responses from Picture Books Reviewed

Literary Feature	Criteria	Yes Rating Total
Physical Appearance of Book (American Library Association, 2008; Nasatir, 2002)	Format is appealing for children; relatively simple instead of overly sophisticated.	52 (95%)
	Illustrations and images are realistic and/or appropriate.	42 (76%)
	Illustrations and images show the distinctive personality of the character with a disability. (They do not appear stereotypically alike, as if all people with disabilities look the same.)	52 (95%)
Characterization (Altieri, 2006; Andrews, 1998; (Beckett et al., 2010; Brenna, 2008; Dyches et al., 2009; Golos et al., 2012; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Koc et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Sotto & Ball, 2006; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011)	Focuses on common traits of all people while showing human qualities of people with disabilities.	48 (87%)
	Positive interactions exist among characters with and without disabilities.	47 (85%)
Literary Style (American Library Association, 2008, Andrews, 1998; Prater et al., 2006)	Language/vocabulary is appropriate for children/clear style/appropriate vocabulary.	51 (93%)
	The narrative and dialogue portraying characters with disabilities is appropriate for age of reader.	52 (95%)
	Descriptions provide colorful imagery without being lengthy.	51 (93%)
	Catches interest within first 3-5 pages.	51 (93%)
Plot (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1998/1999; Leininger et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Nasatir, 2002; Prater et al., 2006; Wopperer, 2011)	The character with the disability plays a major role in the plot.	50 (91%)
	Plot is realistic/believable (e.g., character with a disability is not portrayed as a superhero, the character is not cured, parents are not saints, etc.).	43 (78%)
	Interesting plot throughout story.	51 (93%)
	Dialogue and action are used to develop the plot.	53 (96%)
	Plot progresses in a chronological order.	46 (84%)
Setting (Prater et al., 2006)	The setting allows the character with the disability to be included in society (school, work, recreation).	41 (75%)
	Portrays up- to- date practices regarding living with disabilities.	41 (75%)
	Accurate historical/current perspective of people with disabilities living within society.	50 (91%)
Theme (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Beckett et al., 2010; Golos & Moses, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Kunze, 2013; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Prater et al., 2006)	The theme teaches a valuable lesson about interacting with people with disabilities.	43 (78%)
	The theme is familiar and appealing to children (making friends, sibling conflicts, school issues, etc.).	48 (87%)

Table 6. Items Earning 25% or Fewer (n=14 or fewer) Yes Responses from Picture Books Reviewed

Literary Feature	Criteria	Yes Rating Total
Plot (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1998/1999; Leininger et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Nasatir, 2002; Prater et al., 2006; Wopperer, 2011)	The story does not revolve around the character’s disability; the same story could take place if all characters were typically-developing.	11 (20%)
Theme (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Beckett et al., 2010; Golos & Moses, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Kunze, 2013; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Prater et al., 2006)	The story promotes the social model of disability. (Disability is viewed as a product of societal limitations rather than a biological problem that should be corrected through medical intervention.)	8 (15%)

Implications of Findings

Publication Data

There is no evidence from my study indicating that books published in the United Kingdom or other countries outside the United States represented higher- or lower-quality portrayals of characters with disabilities compared to those produced in the U.S.. All but one text on my highest-scoring list was published in the U.S., but U.S. publications also make up every item on my lowest-scoring list. Books from the United Kingdom all fell in the mid-range of scores, so I can conclude that although UK initiatives to increase the number of children's books that include characters with disabilities may have contributed to a sturdy presence of these books in the body of texts I studied, more careful considerations of the quality of these portrayals need to be conducted (Altieri, 2008; Beckett et al., 2010; Kurts & Gavigan, 2008; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008).

My findings regarding U.S. publications imply that United States authors and publishing companies are capable of producing high-quality picture books that include characters with disabilities, but poor-quality books or unfavorable portrayals still are accepted for publication or slip through the cracks through self-publication practices or online retailing. It is concerning to realize that unofficial publishing portals can stream poor-quality texts with negative messages into the children's literature canon, where they can be accessed by children and contribute to negative attitudes toward people with disabilities. Authors and illustrators of children's books that touch on such sensitive topics should accept the responsibility of the task and adhere to high standards of quality.

Character Demographics and Disability Categories Portrayed

It is appropriate that the majority of characters with disabilities portrayed in the picture books I reviewed are children, as these characters will have the greatest likelihood of establishing relatability for young readers. However, children who have close relatives with disabilities will certainly benefit from portrayals of parents or siblings of child protagonists. Characterizations of animals should not be rejected, for young children will likely identify with personified animal figures. Choosing animal characters can also help authors and illustrators sidestep the complex issue of determining race, ethnicity, etc.

I am not surprised that orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, and autism are the most frequently depicted disability categories, though I did not expect such an extreme gap between orthopedic impairment and the remaining ten disability categories. I acknowledge the relative ease of portraying disabilities that can be visually recognized, and the recent increase in the prevalence of autism was likely to be reflected in the area of children's literature. This phenomena may just be a product of the simplicity of picture books, an effort to expose very young children to images of disabilities while avoiding the introduction of more complex concepts, but more concerning motivations may also be involved and should be considered. The strikingly high prevalence of orthopedic impairments gives an unfortunate nod to the trope of attempting to promote diversity and inclusion by simply drawing a child who uses a wheelchair in the background of a scene. Nearly half ($n=11$, 48%) of all the characters whose disabilities I designated as part of the orthopedic impairment category used wheelchairs. In isolation this is not a problem, but none of these texts give any explanation of the situations behind the characters' wheelchair use, and the majority of the books that include characters who use

wheelchairs ($n=8$, 73%) fail to portray the characters as complex, well-developed individuals. Only three of the eleven ($n=3$, 27%) earned *Yes* ratings on the revised Menchetti et al. (2011) rubric on the item *The character with a disability is well developed*. Nearly all ($n=10$, 91%) of the books that include characters who use wheelchairs provide no indications that the characters have any other disabilities or differ in any other way from the typically-developing population. While there certainly are many individuals who use wheelchairs and have completely typical intellectual development and other functional capabilities, there are also many individuals who use wheelchairs due to the presence of multiple disabilities. I presume that the appeal of crafting characters who use wheelchairs in the simple way favored by the authors of books in my study is the opportunity to incorporate diversity while avoiding deviance from typical plotlines and routine characterizations. I address these issues explicitly not because of any intention to ridicule authors or illustrators or present only negative critiques, but because “heightened awareness can support us in addressing the negative images head on” (Sandefur & Moore, 2004, p. 43).

While the quality of texts portraying all disability categories is certainly important to evaluate, it is also necessary to consider the frequency in which different disabilities are depicted and the implications these data have about the accuracy of messages the body of children’s literature conveys. Based on the frequency data I compiled from this study, children who read a book that includes a character with a disability and was published between 2010 and 2015 will be most likely to read about or observe illustrations that depict orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, and autism. Based on current population data, however, in their schools these children will be most likely to

meet students who have specific learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, or other health impairments such as ADHD (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). It is important for disabilities of all kinds to have a presence in children's literature so that every child can see herself in a story, but more accurate proportional relationships need to be established between the disabilities portrayed in books and those prevalent in the U.S. school population so that inclusive books can have the greatest possible impact in shaping the attitudes and actions of students in today's schools.

Scores and Features of Highest- and Lowest-Scoring Texts

Many of the picture books I evaluated performed remarkably well when evaluated using the revised Menchetti et al. (2011) rubric, a thoroughly detailed measure of the quality of disability portrayals. Twenty texts met seventy-five percent or more of the rubric's criteria ($n=32$, 75%), indicating sensitive, appropriate, and positive portrayals of characters with disabilities. Though these books should be celebrated and there are many positive attributes to be noted in the majority of books I studied, it is concerning that in the years 2010-2015 many generally unfavorable texts are still being published. The range of scores acquired with the evaluation rubric was 6-37, demonstrating major discrepancies in the quality of portrayals observed across the fifty-five books studied.

My findings from studying the features of the highest- and lowest-scoring texts indicate that the highest-quality portrayals of disability are created by authors and illustrators with informed backgrounds. I can also conclude that books that have received official recognition for quality of disability portrayals may not necessarily meet these criteria across different methods of evaluation. There is no significant numerical evidence of differences in quality across individual publication years or disability categories.

Rubric Item Analysis

My item analysis that compiles results from all fifty-five books' rubric evaluations reveals promising data displaying strong majorities of books meeting various criteria, all of which are listed in Table 5. There are only two items from the rubric that received *Yes* responses from 25% of the books or fewer. Only eleven ($n=11$, 20%) books can claim that their stories do not revolve around a character's disability and could take place without alteration if all the characters were typically developing. This means that within picture books published between 2010 and 2015, the vast majority of stories center on themes involving the disability. Past researchers suggest that in order to avoid didacticism, disability should be a secondary element of the story, an element that may shape the plot but is not the central object of focus (Kendrick, 2004; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006; Wopperer, 2011). Future authors should recall these statements and work to develop exciting plots independent of disability, in which diverse characters can each play an active part without serving as instructional tools or objects of intrigue.

The other item with a low number of *Yes* responses addresses the social model of disability. Only eight texts ($n=8$, 15%) were clearly written with this perspective, in which disability is viewed as a product of societal limitations rather than a biological problem. Some books ($n=15$, 27%) make references to various medical interventions that emphasize the biological foundations of disability, so they received responses of *No* on the item about the social model. The majority of texts ($n=32$, 58%) earned *Unsure* ratings, though, because there was not enough information to conclude which perspective is upheld in the story. I recognize the value of the social model of disability; it promotes

the belief that nothing is wrong with people who have disabilities and encourages society to make necessary changes in order to accommodate the needs of diverse individuals. I am uncertain about some tenets of the model, though, particularly those articulated by Golos and Moses in their articles about portrayals of characters who are deaf (Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos, Moses, & Wolbers, 2012). When deafness is established as a culture and the education of students who are deaf in special schools is encouraged, I observe that the gap between individuals with disabilities and the rest of society is only widened. I think adhering to the social model may assign deafness as a greater part of an individual's identity than it needs to be, defining him by disability first and then by other characteristics. I have these uncertainties, but I recognize that I have an outside perspective, and it is therefore inappropriate for me to fully judge whether the social model is a source of positive influence in the Deaf community. I included an item addressing the social model on my revised rubric because it was a frequent subject of discussion among past researchers (Beckett et al., 2010; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos et al., 2012; Hughes, 2012; Kunze, 2013; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011). However, because it is not openly promoted by a strong majority of researchers in the field, I do not think it is a cause for concern that most of the children's books I reviewed do not clearly advocate the social model of disability.

Certain other items on the revised rubric are also worthy of discussion. As previously mentioned, I granted many books *N/A* responses on items about the terminology used to refer to disabilities, person-first language, and the presence of accurate information about the disabilities. *N/A* responses to these items can indicate strengths of the texts, however, rather than weaknesses. It is acceptable and even

encouraged by past researchers for characters with disabilities to simply be a part of storylines in texts that do not explicitly name or discuss the disabilities portrayed (Matthew & Clow, 2007; Wopperer, 2011).

A greater number of books earned *No* responses than did *Yes* responses on the item *The character with a disability grows and changes throughout the story*. Though it is certainly important for a character with a disability to be dynamic and complex, it is not problematic for a character who is portrayed as confident and self-assured at the beginning of the story to maintain that disposition throughout the book.

Comparison to Findings of Past Research

Previous studies revealed a dearth in texts that allowed characters with disabilities to fill the role of protagonist (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Kendrick, 2004; Matthew & Clow, 2007). In contrast to this paucity, the data from my book evaluations revealed that a majority ($n=38$, 69%) of the picture books published between 2010 and 2015 that include characters with disabilities place these characters in the role of protagonist. Though not all are first-person narrators, these characters are the central focus and heroes of the stories in which they are depicted.

Past researchers also commented on the increasing, though still insufficient, frequency of portrayals that feature characters with disabilities who also represent racial or cultural minority populations (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos et al., 2012; Konrad et al., 2007). I included an item on my revised rubric that would allow me to gather information on this topic, though I listed diversity of lifestyle or family structure along with ethnic, racial, or linguistic diversity, so I cannot determine the extent of racial or cultural minority representations apart from other types of diversity. I would

have needed to distinguish the two categories in order to make specific statements about prevalence of minority representations, but I calculated that over one-third of the books ($n=20$, 36%) include characters who represent a different lifestyle than the typical Caucasian, English-speaking, middle-class individual living in a one-generational household with heterosexual, nondivorced parents. Each of the books I identified as meeting this criteria seemed to include accurate and meaningful depictions of their particular cultural experiences, with the exception of one text, *Amigos: Friends Forever*, that contained a generally favorable portrayal of linguistic diversity tainted by the existence of some stereotypes in the illustrations (Walko, 2012).

Altieri (2008) noted that portrayals of learning disabilities often depict poor educational experiences and negative teacher characters. Each of the five portrayals of learning disabilities I evaluated includes the common theme of struggling in school, with instances of overcoming ridicule from peers or the insensitivities of teachers. Four of the five includes at least one excellent teacher character, though, and in each book the character with a learning disability experienced some level of school success by the end of the story.

Limitations of Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Gathering Past Research and Selecting Children's Books to Review

I compiled a list of children's picture books to evaluate by reviewing lists of recipients of relevant children's literature awards and through searches conducted on Amazon and Follett Titlewave. With more time for research, it would have been possible to scan every source mentioned in past research articles containing lists of books including characters with disabilities. Given additional time and unlimited monetary

resources, I might have been able to obtain every book I discovered through my searches. In the current study I had to depend on an interlibrary loan program and Amazon for ordering.

Method of Evaluation

In this study I did not make efforts to determine the validity and reliability of the revised rubric I created, beyond the fact that an unrevised version had been developed by professionals in the field and used in a previous study (Menchetti et al., 2011). The judgments I made in rating items on the rubric were somewhat subjective, and my findings were not supported by having additional readers and establishing interrater reliability.

I think that the rubric is a satisfactory tool for identifying high-quality texts with positive portrayals of characters with disabilities, though at the conclusion of this study I can now recognize a few flaws with its criteria. There was no item on which to evaluate the overall quality of a book's illustrations; there were only items addressing illustrations' realism, appropriateness, and success in promoting inclusion. Books with low-quality or unrealistic illustrations received *Yes* responses if they could be considered appropriate, so there was no opportunity to distinguish excellent illustrations from those that are poor. I also think an item was needed to address complexity of the storyline and to indicate whether books contained didactic messages. Certain books earned top-eleven spots despite containing overly simplistic, trite, or didactic storylines.

It might have been possible to create a new checklist for evaluation based the criteria of positive portrayals discussed in past research. This checklist design might have warranted results that could be more directly compared to the findings of previous

studies. I might have been able to more successfully draw conclusions about whether portrayals of disabilities in children's books have improved in quality with time.

Findings

I was unable to make more conclusive reports about countries of publication and prominence of publishers for the books I reviewed. These limitations were products of time and expertise restrictions, as well as a lack of access to resources that might more clearly deliver that information for each text. This study could also not report on the accuracy of proportions of male and female characters for each disability category because updated national statistics are not available to use for comparison.

My study does not discuss individual disabilities independently from IDEA disability categories, but a more detailed analysis might include this type of disaggregated data with reports of information on each disability within a category. I made some subjective judgments in assigning each character to a disability category for analysis; had the scope of this study allowed I might have dedicated more careful consideration to this task or enlisted another reader to support my findings. Time did not allow me to comment on all the nuances within my rubric item analysis, such as why a particular item might have received a majority of *No* responses, *Unsure* responses, etc.

Suggestions for Future Research

My study was somewhat limited by a narrow timeframe for completion and my status as an independent researcher rather than a member of a collaborative team. There are numerous opportunities for future research associated with this topic. A study could be conducted in which high-quality picture books are read to young children and their attitudes toward individuals with disabilities are recorded before and after exposure to the

books. A researcher could then observe if after exposure to the books children are more likely to initiate play with peers with disabilities. An additional area of potential study is the impact of books on levels of self-esteem among young children with disabilities. Future research endeavors might also analyze the portrayals of disabilities in early readers or novels published during this same time period, or otherwise modify the focus of this study to yield other meaningful results.

Conclusions

How we portray characters with disabilities in our children's books has extensive implications about the general levels of understanding and acceptance within our society. Perhaps it is appropriate, then, that my research identified many truly excellent representations of disabilities within children's literature published in the past six years, as well as some that are startlingly negative. Our society has progressed immensely in our grasp of how to portray characters with disabilities in literature in realistic and respectful ways. However, there are still individuals involved in book production and publication that demonstrate misguided ideas about how to craft appropriate characterizations of disability.

Authors, as well as consumers, should be aware of the need for more accurate proportions between disability categories represented in books and their prevalence in the U.S. school population. Authors should also endeavor to create more complex storylines and characterizations, while consumers should recognize that the disability experience is not simple and therefore should not be depicted as such within books. Finally, it is necessary to terminate the trend in which stories revolve around disabilities and could not exist apart from this focus.

An annotated bibliography with descriptions of each of the highest-scoring eleven texts from my study can be found in Appendix D. On this list I also included seven books that I thought deserved honorable mention, ones that did not earn top marks on the rubric but that succeed in depicting at least one aspect of the disability experience. Because I noted a few flaws with the rubric, I thought it would be acceptable to acknowledge books that I considered positive but that did not meet as many of the rubric criteria as did my top eleven. It should be noted that these books are worthy of consideration but have not been evaluated on any formal scale. Appendix E contains a reference list with citations of all the children's books I reviewed, a tool for potential use by future researchers. I hope that my annotated bibliography, along with my other writings, might be of use to parents, teachers, librarians, college or university professors of pre-professional teachers, and other persons in the field or in the publication industry. I hope that my work may serve as a guideline for the type of positive texts that should be included when building an inclusive children's literature collection in any setting.

Researchers interested in disability studies, children's literature, or advocacy for the tolerance of diversity should continue to extend the body of research on this worthwhile topic. Future studies will be necessary until the state of progress no longer dictates a need for concern about whether or not there is sufficient availability of books including characters with disabilities or if these texts are appropriate. Author Mark Haddon described his hope for the future while giving a speech upon his receipt of the 2004 Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award for his successful novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, which eloquently depicts a protagonist who has autism:

I...look forward to a time in the not too distant future when such prizes seem outdated and unnecessary, when children with learning difficulties of all kinds are as much a part of our society as children with red hair or children who play the clarinet and readers who do not even notice when a book contains a character with learning difficulties because such books are as common as rain. (Haddon, 2004)

Until that day, we can celebrate the successes and learn from the failures, ever striving to achieve depictions of diversity that move beyond depicting a child in a wheelchair in the background of an illustration, instead promoting acceptance through accurate, respectful, complex, and positive portrayals.

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Appendix A

Revised Rubric

The changes and additions I made to the Menchetti et al. rubric are highlighted (Menchetti et al., 2011).

Book Title and Author:					
Disability Portrayed:					
Age and Sex of Character with Disability:					
Literary Feature	Criteria	Rating			
		Yes	No	Unsure or Mixed	N/A
Physical Appearance of Book (American Library Association, 2008; Nasatir, 2002)	Format is appealing for children; relatively simple instead of overly sophisticated.				
	Illustrations and images are realistic and/or appropriate.				
	Illustrations and images show the distinctive personality of the character with a disability. (They do not appear stereotypically alike, as if all people with disabilities look the same.)				
	Illustrations and images show the character with a disability actively involved in the environment.				
Characterization (Altieri, 2006; Andrews, 1998; Beckett, Ellison, Barrett, & Shah, 2010; Brenna, 2008; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches, Prater, & Leininger, 2009; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos, Moses, & Wolbers, 2012; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Koc, Koc, & Ozdemir, 2010; Landrum, 1998/1999; Leininger, Dyches, Prater, & Heath, 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Nasatir, 2002; Prater, Dyches, & Johnston, 2006; Sotto & Ball, 2006; Worotynecc, 2004; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011)	Focuses on common traits of all people while showing human qualities of people with disabilities.				
	The character with the disability possesses dynamic qualities and is not only defined by his/her disability.				
	Character accepts his/her own disability and focuses on his/her abilities.				
	Characters with and without disabilities use correct terminology when referring to the disability itself.				
	Positive interactions exist among characters with and without disabilities.				
	The character is not presented as a stereotyped case (e.g., violent, laughable, a burden, pitiable, victimized, dependent, lesson in perseverance, exists only to initiate the development of an able-bodied character, etc.)				
	A positive portrayal of character's strengths exists.				
	Character is portrayed as confident and able to make own decisions.				
	Character is accepted by the majority of his/her peers.				
	A balance of roles exists between the character with a disability and characters without a disability. (Characters share roles of leaders, problem-solvers, role models, and heroes. Characters with disabilities are not only in subsidiary or inferior roles.)				
	The character with a disability grows and changes throughout the story.				
	The character with a disability also represents ethnic, racial, or linguistic diversity or diversity in lifestyle or family structure.				
Literary Style (American Library Association, 2008, Andrews, 1998; Prater et al., 2006)	Person-first language is used appropriately (e.g. "a boy with an intellectual disability" instead of "the intellectually disabled boy").				
	Terms used to describe characters and settings are appropriate.				
	Language/vocabulary is appropriate for children/clear style/appropriate vocabulary.				
	The narrative and dialogue portraying characters with disabilities is appropriate for age of reader.				
	Descriptions provide colorful imagery without being lengthy.				
	Dialogue among characters is genuine.				
Plot (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1998/1999; Leininger et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Nasatir, 2002; Prater et	The character with the disability plays a major role in the plot.				
	The character's disability is naturally revealed throughout the plot.				
	The plot highlights the abilities of the character (not just disabilities).				
	Plot is realistic/believable (e.g., character with a disability is not portrayed as a superhero, the character is not cured, parents are not saints, etc.).				

al., 2006; Wopperer, 2011)	The plot shows the character with a disability having similar life experiences as peers without disabilities (e.g., similar conflicts, similar goals, similar likes, etc.).				
	Accurate information regarding the disability is provided throughout the plot.				
	The character with a disability is well developed.				
	Interesting plot throughout story.				
	Dialogue and action are used to develop the plot.				
	Uses humor appropriately.				
	Plot progresses in a chronological order.				
	The story does not revolve around the character's disability; the same story could take place if all characters were typically-developing.				
Setting (Prater et al., 2006)	The setting allows the character with the disability to be included in society (school, work, recreation).				
	Portrays up- to- date practices regarding living with disabilities.				
	Accurate historical/current perspective of people with disabilities living within society.				
Theme (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Beckett et al., 2010; Golos & Moses, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Kunze, 2013; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Prater et al., 2006)	The theme teaches a valuable lesson about interacting with people with disabilities.				
	The theme rectifies a stereotype/myth about people with disabilities.				
	The theme is familiar and appealing to children (making friends, sibling conflicts, school issues, etc.).				
	The story promotes the social model of disability. (Disability is viewed as a product of societal limitations rather than a biological problem that should be corrected through medical intervention.)				
Point of View (Prater et al., 2006)	Written from the perspective of the character with a disability, either in first-person or third-person limited form.				
Totals					

Appendix B

List of Books Ordered by Score

1. King for a Day	37
2. The Art of Miss Chew	36
3. Lilliana Grows it Green	36
4. My Name is Blessing	33
5. My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay	33
6. The Boy Who Learned Upside Down	32
7. Jacob's Eye Patch	32
8. Sienna's Locket	31
9. How to Roll Like Chris P. Bacon	31
10. My Brother Charlie	31
11. The First Day Speech	31
12. Hands & Hearts: With 15 Words in American Sign Language	30
13. Jeremy's Dreidel	30
14. Different is Awesome!	29
15. Missy Mouse Goes on a Picnic	29
16. Hudson Hates School	28
17. Katrina and Winter: Partners in Courage	28
18. The Pirate of Kindergarten	28
19. Pedro's Whale	28

MORE THAN A WHEELCHAIR IN THE BACKGROUND

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20. Amigos: Friends Forever	27
21. Janine	27
22. My Friend Has Autism	27
23. The Gift of Grace	27
24. My Best Buddy	26
25. Jasper and the Magpie: Enjoying Special Interests Together	26
26. You Can Be a Friend	26
27. Welly Walks	26
28. Catherine's Story	25
29. Max the Champion	25
30. The Prince Who Was Just Himself	25
31. Back to Front and Upside Down	25
32. The Mitten String	25
33. Just Because	24
34. Super Cyclist	24
35. Tara's Lookout	23
36. Anthony Best: A Picture Book about Asperger's	22
37. My Chair	22
38. Bertie Bumble Bee: Troubled by the Letter "B"	21
39. Andy and Spirit Meet the Rodeo Queen	20
40. Yuko-Chan and the Daruma Doll: The Adventures of a Blind Japanese Girl Who Saves Her Village	20

41. David's World: A Picture Book about Living with Autism	18
42. A Boy and a Jaguar	18
43. Ellie Bean the Drama Queen	16
44. Bad-Off Boris and the Cupcake Cave-In	15
45. Vivaldi's Four Seasons	13
46. Dachy's Deaf	12
47. The Little Potcakes	12
48. Blueberry Lu	12
49. The King of Fish	12
50. My Friend Suhana	11
51. Bailey Enjoys His First Holiday Season	10
52. Invizy & the Misfit Supers	8
53. The Lemonade Ripple: A Sweet Story of Kindness and Charity	7
54. Rolling with Life	6
55. Poor William Dill	6

Appendix C

Rating Totals from All Book Evaluations

Book Title, Author, and Publication Year:					
Disability Portrayed:					
Age and Sex of Character with Disability:					
Literary Feature	Criteria	Rating Totals			
		Yes	No	Unsure or Mixed	N/A
Physical Appearance of Book (American Library Association, 2008; Nasatir, 2002)	Format is appealing for children; relatively simple instead of overly sophisticated.	52	1	2	0
	Illustrations and images are realistic and/or appropriate.	42	2	11	0
	Illustrations and images show the distinctive personality of the character with a disability. (They do not appear stereotypically alike, as if all people with disabilities look the same.)	52	2	1	0
	Illustrations and images show the character with a disability actively involved in the environment.	37	15	3	0
Characterization (Altieri, 2006; Andrews, 1998; (Beckett, Ellison, Barrett, & Shah, 2010; Brenna, 2008; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches, Prater, & Leininger, 2009; Golos & Moses, 2011; Golos, Moses, & Wolbers, 2012; Hughes, 2012; Kendrick, 2004; Koc, Koc, & Ozdemir, 2010; Landrum, 1998/1999; Leininger, Dyches, Prater, & Heath, 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Myers & Bersani, 2008; Nasatir, 2002; Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006; Sotto & Ball, 2006; Worotyneec, 2004; Yenika-Agbaw, 2011)	Focuses on common traits of all people while showing human qualities of people with disabilities.	48	2	5	0
	The character with the disability possesses dynamic qualities and is not only defined by his/her disability.	36	8	11	0
	Character accepts his/her own disability and focuses on his/her abilities.	18	3	34	0
	Characters with and without disabilities use correct terminology when referring to the disability itself.	18	4	6	27
	Positive interactions exist among characters with and without disabilities.	47	3	4	1
	The character is not presented as a stereotyped case (e.g., violent, laughable, a burden, pitiable, victimized, dependent, lesson in perseverance, exists only to initiate the development of an able-bodied character, etc.)	20	13	22	0
	A positive portrayal of character's strengths exists.	40	12	3	0
	Character is portrayed as confident and able to make own decisions.	31	3	21	0
	Character is accepted by the majority of his/her peers.	23	11	21	0
	A balance of roles exists between the character with a disability and characters without a disability. (Characters share roles of leaders, problem-solvers, role models, and heroes. Characters with disabilities are not only in subsidiary or inferior roles.)	37	9	8	1
	The character with a disability grows and changes throughout the story.	24	29	2	0
	The character with a disability also represents ethnic, racial, or linguistic diversity or diversity in lifestyle or family structure.	20	35	0	0
	Literary Style (American Library Association, 2008, Andrews, 1998; Prater et al., 2006)	Person-first language is used appropriately (e.g. "a boy with an intellectual disability" instead of "the intellectually disabled boy").	21	4	6
Terms used to describe characters and settings are appropriate.		37	2	16	0
Language/vocabulary is appropriate for children/clear style/appropriate vocabulary.		51	1	3	0
The narrative and dialogue portraying characters with disabilities is appropriate for age of reader.		52	1	2	0
Descriptions provide colorful imagery without being lengthy.		51	2	1	1
Dialogue among characters is genuine.		36	3	7	9
Catches interest within first 3-5 pages.		51	0	4	0
Plot (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Landrum, 1998/1999; Leininger et al., 2010; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Nasatir, 2002; Prater et al., 2006; Wopperer, 2011)	The character with the disability plays a major role in the plot.	50	3	2	0
	The character's disability is naturally revealed throughout the plot.	37	5	12	1
	The plot highlights the abilities of the character (not just disabilities).	39	10	6	0
	Plot is realistic/believable (e.g., character with a disability is not portrayed as a superhero, the character is not cured, parents are not saints, etc.).	43	2	10	0
	The plot shows the character with a disability having similar life experiences as peers without disabilities (e.g., similar conflicts, similar goals, similar likes, etc.).	37	11	7	0
	Accurate information regarding the disability is provided throughout the plot.	21	5	12	17
	The character with a disability is well developed.	26	15	14	0

	Interesting plot throughout story.	51	1	3	0
	Dialogue and action are used to develop the plot.	53	1	0	1
	Uses humor appropriately.	23	2	3	27
	Plot progresses in a chronological order.	46	0	3	6
	The story does not revolve around the character's disability; the same story could take place if all characters were typically-developing.	11	31	13	0
Setting (Prater et al., 2006)	The setting allows the character with the disability to be included in society (school, work, recreation).	41	6	8	0
	Portrays up- to- date practices regarding living with disabilities.	41	4	9	1
	Accurate historical/current perspective of people with disabilities living within society.	50	0	4	1
Theme (American Library Association, 2008; Andrews, 1998; Beckett et al., 2010; Golos & Moses, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Kunze, 2013; Matthew & Clow, 2007; Prater et al., 2006)	The theme teaches a valuable lesson about interacting with people with disabilities.	43	11	1	0
	The theme rectifies a stereotype/myth about people with disabilities.	39	16	0	0
	The theme is familiar and appealing to children (making friends, sibling conflicts, school issues, etc.).	48	0	7	0
	The story promotes the social model of disability. (Disability is viewed as a product of societal limitations rather than a biological problem that should be corrected through medical intervention.)	8	15	32	0
Point of View (Prater et al., 2006)	Written from the perspective of the character with a disability, either in first-person or third-person limited form.	38	16	1	0
Totals					

Appendix D

Annotated Bibliography of Noteworthy Texts

Top Eleven Texts According to Rubric

- *King for a Day* (score of 37)

Set in Pakistan, this story follows Malik and his siblings as they participate in the kite battles that are a special tradition during the festival of Basant. Malik uses a wheelchair, but he is able to actively participate and demonstrates considerable skill during the kite battles of the day. He has designed Falcon, a small and fast kite. He wins numerous battles, slicing the strings of many large and impressive kites, including Goliath, the prize kite of the neighbor bully. Malik enjoys basking in the glow of his successes, but he is willing to give away Goliath, his proudest conquest, in order to help another child who is being bullied.

Perhaps the most admirable feature of this text is that it contains an interesting storyline unrelated to the character's disability. Malik's disability is only revealed through illustrations and is unessential to the plot. The book contains unique, high-quality illustrations, and it could be used to teach about the historical origins of an event and the current traditions of Pakistani culture. Readers observe a clear demonstration of Malik's strengths, and the way he is humbled by helping another child grants him a layer of more complex development.

There is perhaps slight evidence of an unfavorable trope in the story, the trend of characters with disabilities being granted extraordinary talents. Malik displays unchallenged dominance in the kite competition. I also disliked the presence of an undeveloped bully character, the stereotypical villain that victimizes a character with a

disability. Malik confronts the bully through the healthy competition of kite battles, though, displaying courage while avoiding further conflict.

Khan, R. & Krömer, C. (2013). *King for a day*. New York: Lee & Low Books Inc.

- *The Art of Miss Chew* (score of 36)

Paired with the excellent illustrations of Patricia Polacco's skilled hand, this autobiographical children's story follows the young Trisha as she discovers and nurtures her artistic talent. Trisha has a learning disability in reading that causes her to perceive words differently. She takes longer to decode and therefore often does poorly on tests if not given extra time. Trisha thrives with the encouragement of caring teachers who help her overcome the criticisms of those who are less understanding. At the book's conclusion, Trisha is honored with a place in the spring art show, where she displays a wonderful and meaningful portrait of her teacher's late father.

I appreciate how this book portrays disability as a different way of seeing the world, a unique perspective that can have special benefits. Trisha struggles with reading because she sees patterns in words before she can decode the letters, but this perspective is part of what contributes to her artistic ability. This kind of story would be excellent for fueling discussions and encouraging students to see the best in themselves and others.

Although it is a true story and therefore certainly realistic, not all students may be able to identify with a character with a disability who also has extraordinary talents. I classified Trisha's difficulty with reading as a learning disability, but it seems to be corrected with relative ease with the allowance of extra time on tests. The simplicity in correcting the problem may also not be realistic in all cases. This book also continues the trend of students with learning disabilities having poor experiences in schools. A mean-

spirited teacher refuses to acknowledge Trisha's artistic talents and dismisses her reading difficulty as an issue of laziness. Thankfully this story also recognizes two exceptional teachers who help meet Trisha's needs while nurturing her strengths.

Polacco, P. (2012). *The art of Miss Chew*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons of Penguin Group Inc.

- *Lilliana Grows it Green* (score of 36)

This story centers on a girl named Lilliana and her family as they work to create a garden and interact with other community members who are also involved in the project. Lilliana enjoys being able to help with the tasks in preparing the garden, but her feelings are hurt when she overhears a neighbor talking negatively about her. Throughout the course of the story, it is naturally revealed that Lilliana becomes overwhelmed in certain situations and needs to communicate in modified ways, characteristics typically associated with autism. With the love and support of her family, Lilliana continues assisting with the project and carries out an act of generosity that changes the neighbor's attitude. The text is accompanied by realistic illustrations.

This book is unique in many ways. It is the only portrayal of a female character with autism, and one of the only ones to depict it without explicitly naming the disability. This text also serves as an excellent representation of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity. A Hispanic family is the focus of the story, and the text is written in both English and Spanish. An afterword reveals that the garden development project described in the story is an outreach effort to help people in impoverished circumstances become more self-sustaining. The book succeeded in portraying the

realities of autism while also emphasizing the character's strengths and humanizing the experience by describing natural emotional responses.

Leugs, A. C. (2012). *Lilliana grows it green*. Wyoming, MI: United Church Outreach Ministry.

- *My Name is Blessing* (score of 33)

The main character of this story is a young boy named Muthini who lives in Kenya with his many cousins and his grandmother, who took them all in after their parents died or left. Their family is filled with a lot of love, but they have very little money and not much food to eat. Muthini was born with a hand deformity. He is often taunted, and his name, which means suffering, has always bothered him. Muthini's grandmother encourages him by explaining that, although he has fewer fingers than most, he is gifted with speed to run, a big heart, a clear-thinking head, and a strong spirit. Sadly, Muthini's grandmother realizes that she cannot adequately provide for all her charges. She takes Muthini to a home where many children are cared for, and he is welcomed with acceptance and a new name—Baraka, meaning blessing.

With its setting in an impoverished part of Africa, this book includes scenarios that many American children cannot begin to fathom. However, students who have lived in group homes or in foster care could certainly identify, and the book could be an excellent teaching tool for any child. The text is accompanied by high-quality illustrations.

Unfortunately, I think this book's protagonist is at times portrayed in the stereotype of an object of pity. His family's economic situation, his social rejection, and his wavering self-confidence create this negative perspective. The book earned *Mixed*

ratings on several rubric items involving the character's self-concept and acceptance by peers. The story accurately depicted many of the negative emotions and responses that can sometimes be associated with the disability experience, but the grandmother's view of her grandson's disability and his acceptance in his new home at the book's conclusion promote more positivity.

Walters, E. & Fernandes, E. (2013). *My name is blessing*. Toronto, Canada: Tundra Books of Random House of Canada Limited.

- *My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay* (score of 33)

This book is about a confident young girl named Zulay and her friends. They enjoy school, and help each other when they need it. Zulay is blind, so she does some things at school a little differently, like typing her writing on a special machine. She also works with an occupational therapist, Ms. Turner, who is helping her learn to use a cane to get around independently. When it comes time to sign up for field day activities, Zulay knows she wants to run in the race. She practices with Ms. Turner, and after much hard work she is able to compete at field day with Ms. Turner by her side.

This book conveys the positive message that people with disabilities can accomplish their goals. Zulay was able to do everything she wanted at school and everything the other students did; there were just certain things she had to learn to do slightly differently. The story helps demonstrate Zulay's strengths and her distinctive personality.

Though its theme is positive, this book may contain the stereotype of a character with a disability serving as a lesson in perseverance. I also found some of the illustrations to be a bit simplistic and the dialogue at times unrealistic. Zulay demonstrated a negative

attitude about using her cane, which might accurately reflect the nature of young children with or without disabilities. However, those negative feelings translate into a somewhat negative attitude about the disability.

Best, C. & Brantley-Newton, V. (2015). *My three best friends and me, Zulay*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers.

- *The Boy Who Learned Upside Down* (score of 32)

This book shares the true story of a boy named Alex who struggles in school due to learning disabilities in reading and writing. He is taunted by classmates when he has to go receive help in a separate classroom. He has low expectations that this experience will be any better, but he is excited to find that the teacher, Mrs. Sandy, has a huge pile of stuffed animals in her room that students can earn if they remember to think positively about what they can do, help others, and believe in themselves. Alex desperately wants to earn the stuffed rat, so he works hard to do his reading homework and study his spelling words. He even helps another classmate who is being teased. Alex is so proud when he earns the rat, but when he takes it home his dog Shadow tears out some of its stuffing. Alex's mom is able to help him fix it, and they are inspired to collect stuffed animals for a classroom in another school so that other students can develop the same motivation he did.

The book succeeds in conveying the message that students with learning disabilities can succeed in school with some supports. Readers follow Alex's process of accepting his disability and learning ways of coping with it so he can succeed in school. Because it chronicles this period of transition, the book includes some positive representations of schooling experience and social interactions and others that are

negative. The story does revolve around Alex's disability, and some of the dialogue is unrealistic, making the plot somewhat trite and didactic.

Scattarella, C. & Wheeler, W. (2013). *The boy who learned upside down*. Seattle, WA: Black Heron Books.

- *Jacob's Eye Patch* (score of 32)

This book follows a boy named Jacob and his family on their quest to the science store to buy a light-up globe that Jacob has been wanting for a long time. Jacob wears an eye patch to correct some vision problems he was born with, and on their way Jacob and his mom are stopped by several curious people who ask questions about his patch. Jacob is asked questions like these frequently, and he usually does not mind to answer. In this case he is frustrated, though, because he wants to get the light-up globe before the store closes or someone else buys it. The family arrives in time, though, and Jacob is thrilled. He talks to a little girl in the store who asks him about the patch, and he answers her questions patiently. He notices that the little girl has braces on her teeth, another physical feature that identifies a person as different.

This book succeeds in depicting the disability experience while still humanizing the character and illustrating his characteristics that are common to all children. This story can teach children with physical disabilities how to cope with all the questions they might receive, and it can teach typically-developing children about what it feels like to be asked questions so they understand why they may not always get answers.

Families familiar with the patching system required for certain eye conditions will certainly appreciate this book. However, it may not be as relatable for children whose disabilities may have no treatment options.

Shaw, B. K. & Feiffer, J. (2013). *Jacob's eye patch*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- *Sienna's Locket* (score of 31)

This book is about a girl named Sienna who is able to rescue her grandmother's bird when he flies into a small cabinet. Because Sienna has primordial dwarfism, she is the perfect size to climb into the cabinet and save the bird. Inside, she also finds a ladybug named Rosie who talks to her. Rosie is smaller than her friends and pink instead of red, and she is sad because the other ladybugs have been making fun of her. Sienna is familiar with Rosie's experiences, and she assures her that she is special because she is different and that sometimes being different can help her do things others cannot. Sienna is able to successfully rescue the bird from the cabinet, and Sienna's grandmother praises her for using her size to complete this important job. Sienna takes Rosie along in her locket and keeps her close with her.

I appreciate how in this book the main character with a disability, Sienna, plays a helping role, rescuing the bird and encouraging Rosie. Rosie is technically a second character with a disability, though she is not well developed. There is no depiction of her strengths, and she is not confident and does not accept her disability. Though Rosie's presence in the story enforces Sienna's strong qualities, her negative characterization demonstrates the opposite of a favorable representation of disability. With the inclusion of a talking animal character, fantastical elements take place in a realistic fiction setting, making the story somewhat disorienting for older readers. Though a sweet and positive story, the book has a didactic quality and fairly nongenuine dialogue.

Bernal, C. & White, D. (2010). *Sienna's locket*. Spring, TX: Tadpole Press...4 Kids of Smooth Sailing Press.

- *How to Roll Like Chris P. Bacon* (score of 31)

This book creates an animated character based on a real pig and his story of adoption into a veterinarian's family. The pig, Chris P. Bacon, moves with the aid of a special cart because his back legs are impaired. As the narrator of the story, Chris describes his true story and then offers poetic pieces of advice about being a good friend, dealing with embarrassment, being brave, embracing the things that make you unique, and more.

I think children would enjoy reading about Chris P. Bacon. Most children enjoy animals, and the story is silly and fun. Though thoroughly positive in its portrayal of a character with a disability and in its advice, the book is quite didactic, and the pig is depicted as somewhat of a caricature.

Lucero, L., Tracy, K., & Weber, P. (2014). *How to roll like Chris P. Bacon*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House USA.

- *My Brother Charlie* (score of 31)

This book, based on a true story, is narrated by a girl named Callie describing her relationship with her twin brother Charlie. Charlie has autism, and Callie explains how the family discovered this when she and her brother were very young. She explains what makes Charlie different, what bothers her about him, what his strengths are, and how he shows his love to her in nontraditional ways. She describes the warmth and strong bond of love that unifies their family through it all.

I appreciate how this book accurately reflects the perspective of a sibling of a person with a disability. A sibling is likely to have mixed emotions about her relationship with her sibling if it is affected by characteristics of the disability. Though

this is an excellent perspective and one that could be meaningful to siblings and families, it prevents readers from understanding the thoughts and feelings of the individual with a disability. This story has a reflective tone with a central focus on the disability, so it does not meet the rubric criteria about a chronological plot sequence and a storyline independent of the topic of disability.

Peete, H. R., Peete, R. E. with Millner, D. & Evans, S. W. (2010). *My brother Charlie*. New York: Scholastic Inc.

- *The First Day Speech* (score of 31)

This book follows the story of Nathan, a boy who is about to begin his first year of kindergarten. As the first day of school approaches, Nathan expresses anxieties about if he will be accepted by his peers. Soon an idea occurs to him, and he shares it with his mother. He decides that on the first day of school he would like to give a speech to the class to tell them about himself. Nathan has a facial cleft, a deformity he was born with that affects the appearance of his face and the way he talks. On the first day of school he delivers his speech bravely, although he still feels nervous. He tries to answer many of the questions that people typically ask him so that his classmates will understand. The other students receive Nathan's speech well, all also eager to share things that make them different. When Nathan finishes the teacher asks the class who will be his friend, and everyone volunteers. Nathan feels accepted and happy that his new classmates see him as a friend.

This book successfully depicts the emotional experience that can be associated with disability. The text could serve as a useful tool for children with disabilities who are concerned with social acceptance and for typically-developing children who will have the

opportunity to befriend students with disabilities in their classrooms. This book can also give parents and teachers insight into the perspective of a child with a disability who feels like he stands out. The book avoids defining Nathan by his disability, not showing his face until he is depicted standing in front of the class to speak. Readers are thus prevented from judging Nathan by his appearance before they begin to understand his situation, the exact goal that Nathan tries to accomplish by giving a first day speech.

This book's negative qualities include its plot's dependence on the character's disability, its nongenuine dialogue, and the other students' complete and exaggerated acceptance of Nathan. It is more likely that students might still make insensitive comments or that most students would accept Nathan while a few others would not. Still, the book delivers a highly positive message that should be celebrated.

Hadala, I. & Pardo, J. (2012). *The first day speech*. Wild Onion Press.

Honorable Mentions

- *Hands & Hearts: With 15 Words in American Sign Language* (score of 30)

Through poetic language and soft illustrations, this book depicts a mother and daughter enjoying a fun day at the beach together. They play in the waves, swim, build a sandcastle, make a cozy tent, and watch the sunset. The mother and daughter communicate solely in sign language, and illustrations along the margins guide readers so they can learn some signs too.

I included this book on my list of honorable mentions because its score fell closely outside those of the top eleven, and it is perhaps the best example of a book illustrating the social model of disability. It was also one of the only books to focus on a parent-child relationship. The disability was not depicted negatively in any way, and I

think had the story been written in prose form and provided deeper character development it would have earned a higher score according to the rubric.

Napoli, D. J. & Bates, A. (2014). *Hands & hearts: With 15 words in American Sign Language*. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers.

- *Jeremy's Dreidel* (score of 30)

This book is about a boy named Jeremy who attends a dreidel-making workshop at the Jewish Community Center in preparation for Hanukkah. After discussing the story of Hanukkah and the origin of dreidels, the children all begin developing creative designs to make their own. As Jeremy begins working on his dreidel with series of raised dots on each side, the others do not understand. He explains that he is making a dreidel with Braille symbols for his dad, who is blind. The other children ask many questions, and Jeremy helps them understand blindness and all the things that his dad can do, even if he does them a little differently. Jeremy's dreidel is selected as one of the winners to be placed in a showcase, but Jeremy is disappointed because then his dad will not be able to see or play with the dreidel. Instead, the class decides that they will invite people to the community center for a Hanukkah celebration. Jeremy's dad attends and everyone enjoys his special dreidel.

I granted this book an honorable mention because of its depiction of cultural diversity, its representation of a positive parent-child relationship, and its respectful explanations of blindness and how Jeremy's dad conducts his daily activities. It narrowly missed the cutoff position for my top eleven books as well, so I thought it warranted a second review. In a natural way, this book can introduce children to blindness and help resolve common misconceptions about the disability.

Gellman, E. & Mola, M. (2012). *Jeremy's dreidel*. Minneapolis, MN: Kar-Ben

Publishing, Inc. of Lerner Publishing Group, Inc.

- *Different is Awesome!* (score of 29)

In this simple but meaningful story, a boy brings his older brother Ryan to school with him for show and tell. Ryan was born with no left hand, and the curious students in the class have many questions for him. Ryan patiently explains how he can do all the things they ask about, even if he has to do them in modified ways or work a little harder. As each child asks a question, the book describes one of his or her physical characteristics—eye color, skin color, hair color, height, birth marks, glasses, etc. When Ryan has finished answering questions and his younger brother looks around the class, he observes the things that make each of his classmates different. He recognizes that Ryan is different too, and all these differences are what make people interesting and unique.

Though this book is somewhat one-dimensional, makes disability the central topic, and places the character with a disability in the flawed position of an object for show-and-tell, it presents the concept of tolerance in a creative way that is less trite than in many other books. I think this would be a good introductory book for young children to help them understand that everyone is different and deserves acceptance.

Haack, R. & Molebash, W. (2015). *Different is awesome!* Herndon, VA: Mascot Books.

- *Pedro's Whale* (score of 28)

This book shares the story of Pedro, a boy who is beginning kindergarten. Pedro has an autism spectrum disorder, and he has a special interest in whales. He brings a small toy whale to school, but his teacher does not allow him to have it out during class. Pedro becomes very upset. The principal comes in and encourages the teacher that

allowing Pedro to keep his whale helps him learn. She then develops creative ways to involve whales in her instruction, from calendar time to science and math. The class even takes a field trip to an aquarium to see a new baby whale. Pedro is accepted in the class, and they all find ways to enjoy his interest together.

This book does not grant a lot of depth to Pedro's character, but I think it deserves recognition for the concept it demonstrates. The character with a disability is accepted and accommodated so he can participate and thrive in the classroom. The things that make Pedro different are embraced rather than rejected. I think this story delivers a meaningful lesson for teachers of students with disabilities, for parents, and for typically-developing students who may not understand a peer's special interest.

Kluth, P., Schwarz, P., & Canha, J. (2010). *Pedro's whale*. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

- *Jasper and the Magpie: Enjoying Special Interests Together* (score of 26)

This book also explores the topic of the special interests often enjoyed by individuals with autism spectrum disorders. A boy named Jasper is passionate about shiny objects, particularly metals. He enjoys collecting them and studying their scientific properties. Jasper's family and teachers discourage his unusual interest, not understanding the appeal of collecting metal scraps and worrying about his social well-being. Jasper's parents try to convince him to pursue other interests they view as more normal and age-appropriate, and Jasper becomes angry. He remains upset for a week, and his family just wants him to be happy again. With the help of Jasper's grandmothers, his parents prepare a wonderful birthday present for Jasper, filled with foil, mirrors, and shiny scraps they had collected. They also include a note that reassures Jasper he is loved

and his interest is appreciated. Jasper is thrilled. Together, they create a portrait of a magpie covered with shiny pieces.

I thought this book deserved recognition because it contains an accurate and insightful portrayal of autism and attitudes toward special interests. It captures the challenges individuals with autism and their families often have with understanding and communicating with one another. I think the book would be an excellent tool for families to begin a conversation that will help them work toward cooperation. The book did not meet certain rubric criteria because the story is told from the perspective of an outside narrator, so readers do not see a thorough illustration of Jasper's thoughts and feelings. The nature of the storyline also places Jasper in a somewhat stereotypical role, serving the purpose of initiating the development of typically-developing characters.

Mayfield, D. & Merry, A. (2015). *Jasper and the magpie: Enjoying special interests together*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

- *Catherine's Story* (score of 25)

This book describes a girl named Catherine and all the things she can do. Catherine has multiple disabilities. Her cousin Frances thinks she can do all the things Catherine can, and she asks what makes Catherine special. Catherine's dad explains that she can clap in tiny motions, very quietly so no one can hear. She can walk in special boots that are difficult for others to use. When Frances tries, she wobbles and falls down. Catherine cannot talk, but she listens very carefully, unlike most people. At the end of the story Catherine's dad puts her to bed and reminds her how much he loves her and appreciates who she is.

I included this book on my list of honorable mentions because I found it to contain a rare insightful perspective about severe disabilities. It is one of the only books that depicts more severe levels of impairment, and it does so respectfully and positively. Unfortunately Frances's blunt questions detract somewhat from the book's overall positivity, and readers do not gain much insight into Catherine's personal thoughts and feelings. In my opinion, the book also includes overuse of the word *special*, setting Catherine apart and calling into association terms like *special ed*, *special needs*, *special kids*, etc. However, this book could be a model for future authors as they consider how to appropriately depict characters with severe disabilities.

Moore, G. & Littlewood, K. (2010). *Catherine's story*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

- *Just Because* (score of 24)

In this sweet story a young boy named Toby describes his older sister Clemmie and their relationship. Clemmie has multiple disabilities, so there are some things that she cannot do. However, Toby loves her deeply and appreciates her for all the things they enjoy doing together. In his simple narration from the unique perspective of a child, Toby shares how Clemmie is never mean to him, how she makes funny faces and makes him laugh, how they care for their pet bug together, and how they pretend to fly to the moon in Clemmie's wheelchair.

This book offers another model for the depiction of more severe disabilities. It includes an example of a strong and positive sibling relationship, and it encourages readers to take on the perspective of a child and celebrate the simple things that make a person special and pleasant to be around. The book did not meet criteria that would

require knowledge of Clemmie's personal thoughts and feelings, and it is not clear if she can make her own decisions or if she is accepted by same-age peers. The disability is addressed in the first statements of the text, so the book did not earn a *Yes* rating for revealing the disability naturally through the plot. Though it did not earn the highest rubric rating, I think this book is still in many ways a high-quality text that should have a place in libraries and personal collections.

Elliott, R. (2010). *Just because*. Oxford, England: Lion Children's Books.

Appendix E

References of Children's Books Reviewed

- Abdullah, S. & Abdullah, A. (2014). *My friend Suhana*. Ann Arbor, MI: Loving Healing Press.
- Alexander, C. (2012). *Back to front and upside down!*. London: Gullane Children's Books.
- Al-Ghani, K. I. & Al-Ghani, H. (2012). *Bertie Bumble Bee: Troubled by the letter "b"*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Barta, J. & Briseno, H. (2010). *Rolling with life*. Bloomington, IN: Author House.
- Bernal, C. & White, D. (2010). *Sienna's locket*. Spring, TX: Tadpole Press...4 Kids of Smooth Sailing Press.
- Best, C. & Brantley-Newton, V. (2015). *My three best friends and me, Zulay*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers.
- Caputi, E. R. (2012). *Tara's lookout*. Richmond Town, India: Arc Publications.
- Carl, D. & Mack, K. (2010). *Super cyclist*. Richland, WA: Etcetera Press.
- Celenza, A. H. & Kitchel, J. E. (2012). *Vivaldi's four seasons*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing, Inc.
- Cocca-Leffler, M. (2015). *Janine*. Chicago, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.
- Dungy, T. & Dungy, L. (2011). *You can be a friend*. New York: Little Simon Inspirations of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division.
- Elliott, R. (2010). *Just because*. Oxford, England: Lion Children's Books.
- Ensor, H. (2011). *Welly walks*. Cumbria, UK: 2QT Ltd. Publishing.

- Fahy, D. & Inouye, C. (2011). *Anthony Best: A picture book about Asperger's*. New York: Sky Pony Press.
- Ferreira, A. D. (2011). *Bailey enjoys his first holiday season*. Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing.
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- Goff, L. & Mills, J. (2015). *Blueberry Lu*. Lisa Goff, Sold by Amazon Digital Services, Inc.
- Haack, R. & Molebash, W. (2015). *Different is awesome!* Herndon, VA: Mascot Books.
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- Harding, J. & Padgett, D. (2011). *Ellie Bean the drama queen*. Arlington, TX: Sensory World.
- House, D. & Argoff, P. (2011). *The king of fish*. Plantation, FL: Maggie Music, Inc.
- Hudson, E. (2010). *Hudson hates school*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books.
- Hughes, J. (2015). *Dachy's deaf*. New York: Windmill Books.
- John, L. & Elkerton, A. (2013). *My chair*. North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press.
- Kelso, M. J. & Snider, K. C. (2010). *Andy & Spirit meet the rodeo queen*. Saint Louis, MO: Guardian Angel Publishing, Inc.
- Khan, R. & Krömer, C. (2013). *King for a day*. New York: Lee & Low Books Inc.
- Kim, Y. & Tanco, M. (2015). *My best buddy*. Chicago, IL: Norwood House Press.
- Kluth, P., Schwarz, P., & Canha, J. (2010). *Pedro's whale*. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

Leugs, A. C. (2012). *Lilliana grows it green*. Wyoming, MI: United Church Outreach Ministry.

Lucero, L., Tracy, K., & Weber, P. (2014). *How to roll like Chris P. Bacon*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House USA.

Lyon, G. E. & Avril, L. (2010). *The pirate of kindergarten*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Mallory, S. & Brown, R. E. (2011). *Bad-off Boris and the cupcake cave-in*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Mario, C. D. & Hastings, K. (2013). *The little potcakes*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Mayfield, D. & Merry, A. (2015). *Jasper and the magpie: Enjoying special interests together*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

McClelland, G. M. & Moskovitz, N. (2011). *The gift of Grace*. Gainesville, FL: Wild Onion Press.

Moore, G. & Littlewood, K. (2010). *Catherine's story*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

Mostoller, M. (2011). *Poor William Dill*. Baltimore, MD: Publish America.

Mueller, D. H. (2012). *David's world: A picture books about living with autism*. New York: Sky Pony Press.

Napoli, D. J. & Bates, A. (2014). *Hands & hearts: With 15 words in American Sign Language*. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers.

Peete, H. R., Peete, R. E. with Millner, D. & Evans, S. W. (2010). *My brother Charlie*. New York: Scholastic Inc.

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- Schnee, S. & Sistig, H. (2015). *The prince who was just himself*. New York: Plough Publishing House.
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Tourville, A. D. & Sorra, K. (2010). *My friend has autism*. Mankato, MN: Picture Window Books.

Walko (2012). *Amigos: Friends forever*. New York: Sky Pony Press.

Walters, E. & Fernandes, E. (2013). *My name is blessing*. Toronto, Canada: Tundra Books of Random House of Canada Limited.

Wiser, S. (2012). *Invizy & the misfit supers*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.