

Contrived or inspired: Ability/disability in the children's picture book ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Complete article available in html. ^[2]

Excerpts from article:

Early childhood educators embrace multiculturalism. The goal of multicultural early childhood education is to prevent children from absorbing stereotypes and to teach them to respect one another's differences. In the early childhood marketplace, manufacturers produce items to meet the demands of the multicultural classroom. Preschools and kindergartens provide everything from plastic sushi in the house centre to child-sized saris in the dress-up corner. A staple in the urban preschool, children's picture books must also address and represent the diversity of the community.

How inclusive are children's books? How inclusive should they be? Books that depict exclusively white, middle-class, nuclear family focussed characters and lifestyles are rejected. Educators insist that children's books must reflect their own communities and the reality of our ever-growing cosmopolitan society. Multicultural children's literature exists. But beyond multiculturalism, how effectively do children's picture books convey a message of tolerance and acceptance with regard to ability/disability?

To answer this question, lists of best children's books were analyzed. The New York Public Library's (NYPL) "100 Picture Books Everyone Should Know" was chosen because as an institution the library has credibility and because the use of "everyone" implies inclusion. The equally credible organization, the Educational Resources and Information Center Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (ERIC) provided the list of "Children's Books about Disabilities".

This paper looks at six picture books: two from the NYPL list, two from the ERIC list, one book that appears on both lists and one that doesn't appear on either. The paper compares the books using a checklist designed by the Circle of Inclusion, which is an organization dedicated to supporting inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream society.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: special needs ^[4]

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