

Juvenile Literature and the Portrayal of Developmental Disabilities

Tina Taylor Dyches, Mary Anne Prater, and Melissa Leininger
Brigham Young University

Abstract: Because characters with developmental disabilities (DD) in children's books are often the first images many children encounter, their accurate and multidimensional portrayal is critical. Therefore, the depictions of characters with DD in 41 children's books were analyzed. These books were eligible for the biennial Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award, and were published between 2004 and 2007. Data were analyzed for four main themes, namely characterization, relationships, changes in characters, and special topics. Trends across this and two previous studies (Dyches, Prater, & Cramer, 2001; Dyches & Prater, 2005) include a growing number of books published annually, increasing numbers of characters with DD who are culturally diverse, more positive portrayals, characters who are being more self-determined, engaging in more caregiving and teaching roles, and enjoying more inclusionary recreational activities. Recommendations for future authors and educational service providers are provided.

Many children's books include characters with disabilities. Each of the 13 disabilities recognized in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 can be found in fictional works written for children. However, many of these books are written to instruct the reader about the disability rather than to include a character with a disability in an engaging, well-written story (Prater & Dyches, 2008).

Even though tens of thousands of juvenile books are published annually, not all of them are considered of high quality. Quality juvenile literature is judged in terms of characterization, setting, plot, and theme. Characters should be real to children. They should be credible and consistent. Even though they may change and grow, the character should not be a totally different person as a result of what occurs in the story. A dynamic character is well developed, has a variety of traits making him or her believable, and changes throughout the story (e.g., from shy to poised, selfless to selfish) (Lukens, 2007). A static character does not change as a result of the story's plot.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tina Taylor Dyches, Brigham Young University, 340-F McKay Building, Provo, UT 84602. Email: Tina_dyches@byu.edu

In terms of other elements impacting quality literature, the setting is defined as the geographic location and time period, as well as the cultural aspects of the environment. The plot refers to the events that take place during the story and the theme is the abstract ideas embedded in the story, such as strengthening friendships, recognizing prejudice, and becoming more independent (Sawyer, 2009).

High quality literature also has an engaging narrative style. "The style is reflected in the choice of words, the figures of speech, the rhythmic pattern of the language, the structure of sentences, and the use of rhetorical devices" (Sawyer, 2009, p. 87). Included in the style is the point of view or the perspective from which the story is told. Children's books are usually told from the perspective of a child. In addition, high quality illustrations are evaluated in terms of artistic modes (e.g., paint, crayon, chalk), integration with the text, as well as attention to detail, texture, and color (Sawyer). Quality illustrations clarify and amplify the text, "extending it beyond the words or the reader's imagination" (Lukens, 2007, p. 44).

Given that all literature expresses values, books must be judged on the values they express (Mills, 2002). Books with characters with disabilities often endorse demeaning attitudes

TABLE 1

Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award Winners

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author (Illustrator)</i>	<i>Disability</i>	<i>Year Awarded</i>	<i>Type</i>
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i>	Mark Haddon	Asperger Syndrome	2004	Chapter
<i>Ian's Walk</i>	Laurie Lears (Karen Ritz)	Autism	2000	Picture
<i>Keeping Up with Roo</i>	Sharlee Glenn (Dan Andreason)	Intellectual Disability	2006	Picture
<i>Me and Rupert Goody</i>	Barbara O'Connor	Intellectual Disability	2002	Chapter
<i>My Brother Sammy</i>	Becky Edwards (David Armitage)	Autism	2002	Picture
<i>A Small White Scar</i>	K. A. Nuzum	Down Syndrome	2008	Chapter
<i>So B. It</i>	Sarah Weeks	Intellectual Disability	2006	Chapter
<i>Tru Confessions</i>	Janet Tashjian	Intellectual Disability	2000	Chapter

toward individuals with disabilities, equate low intelligence with poor moral character, present positive attitudes but in a preachy way, or compensate for the character's disability by giving them more of something else (e.g., heart, soul, compassion) (Mills). Books portraying characters with disabilities should be judged, not only on the attributes of high quality literature, but on the values it promotes as expressed in the portrayal of the character with disabilities.

Several authors have created guidelines against which to evaluate and select such books (e.g., Blaska, 2003; Dyches & Prater, 2000; Heim, 1994). Characters with disabilities in contemporary settings should be both positive and realistic. For example, the character with disabilities should be shown to be acting upon high expectations and choices, as well as making positive contributions. The strengths, not just limitations of the character should be portrayed; and they should be shown engaging in reciprocal relationships with others, and being afforded the same citizenship rights as others (Dyches & Prater, 2005). Portrayals should also be realistic in terms of physical, behavioral, and language attributes. This is not unlike the standard for all quality books—their portrayals should be considered “credible, consistent, multidimensional—characters who continue to grow and develop” (Dyches & Prater, 2005, p. 202).

Books that meet both the high standards for juvenile literature and high standards for the

portrayal of disabilities are rare. To recognize books that do meet these criteria, the Division on Developmental Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children established the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award in 2000. This award is granted to authors and illustrators of high quality literature who portray characters with developmental disabilities in positive and appropriate ways. Since the establishment of the award, three picture books and five chapter books have received the award (see Table 1).

Three previous studies have analyzed the portrayal of developmental disabilities in children's literature. First, Prater (1999) reviewed 68 children's fiction books that portrayed individuals with mental retardation published between 1965 and 1996. The books were included in the study if they appeared in at least 2 of the 27 sources. Prater found that few stories were told from the perspective of the character with mental retardation (MR), most characters with MR did not develop, and most served as a catalyst for another character to change. Most of the characters with MR were portrayed as victims, with other characters being the perpetrator or protector. They were also portrayed as being dependent on family members, particularly siblings. Many books portrayed a character without a disability gaining greater appreciation, affection, or understanding of the character with MR. Only a few included schooling, and when they did, the characters were attending segregated schools. Almost all characters lived at home and when

employment was discussed, it centered on sheltered workshops.

In the second study, Dyches, Prater, & Cramer (2001) analyzed the characterization of mental retardation and autism in 12 picture and chapter books published in 1997 and 1998. Efforts were made to locate all books published during those years. They concluded that more characters with mental retardation or autism were portrayed as being educated in more inclusive settings and making choices for themselves than Prater (1999) had discovered. Most of the portrayals were male and all of the illustrations depicted characters as European-American. Proportionately, more books were picture books than in the Prater study. In terms of relationships, results were similar to the previous study. Many characters were protected from victimization and dependent on others. Characters with MR or autism were beginning, however, to emerge as protectors, teachers, and caregivers.

Dyches and Prater (2005) in the third study examined 34 picture and chapter books portraying developmental disabilities published between 1999 and 2003. They reported similar results from the Dyches et al. (2001) study. A strong majority of portrayals of characters with developmental disabilities (DD) were realistic and positive. However, males with DD were overrepresented. When compared to the previous study, more books (a) depicted autism spectrum disorders, (b) included characters from diverse cultures, and (c) portrayed characters with DD growing and developing in realistic ways. In addition, there were fewer characterizations of Down syndrome and the most common primary relationship for the character with DD shifted from siblings to peers. Also, the characters with DD were receiving more appropriate educational services, but their recreational activities were not aligned with best practices.

In their conclusion, Dyches and Prater (2005) called for authors to add depth and multidimensionality to characters with DD. "These characters should be shown making deliberate choices that significantly impact their lives and the lives of others; serving more as protectors, teachers, and caregivers of others; and engaging in inclusionary recreational activities." (p. 215). The purpose of this study was to analyze the general characterization of

individuals with DD in juvenile literature published initially in 2004–2007 and compare these results with two previous studies.

Method

We examined 41 juvenile books using a qualitative, descriptive design, and compared these characterizations with those described in two earlier studies (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2001). The design, method, and purpose are simply descriptive (see Sandelowski, 2000).

Book Selection

To be included in the study, the books were required to meet four criteria. They must have (a) included a main or supporting human character with a developmental disability; (b) been recognized as a picture or chapter book written for children or young adults, in story format, including biographies written in story format; (c) been published initially in English between 2004 and 2007; and (d) been published by a commercial publisher rather than through vanity press.

The first step was to identify children's books that include characters with disabilities. The authors consulted with children's literature librarians and used search terms such as *developmental disability*, *mental retardation*, *intellectual disability*, *Down syndrome*, *multiple disability*, *autism*, and *Asperger Syndrome* to locate books in relevant issues of *Children's Books in Print* (R.R. Bowker's Database Publishing Group, 2007) and from various print and electronic book lists.

Next, each book was reviewed to determine if the main or supporting character had a developmental disability. For this study, *developmental disability* was defined as a condition which occurs before a person is 22 years of age that limits him/her in at least three of seven major life activities (e.g., receptive and expressive language, self-care, and economic self-sufficiency), and includes conditions such as intellectual disabilities, autism, Asperger Syndrome, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and multiple disabilities. More than 70 children's books were found which did not qualify for the study, because they included non-human characters, individuals

who did not clearly have a developmental disability or who were minor characters, books that were not written in story format, or were self-published. All books analyzed in this study qualified to be considered for either the 2006 or 2008 Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award.

Data Analysis

Characterizations were submitted to content analysis according to qualitative methods described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994). Ten reviewers, including special education teachers, parents of children with developmental disabilities, adults with developmental disabilities, children's literature librarians, special education professors, and children's literature illustrators, provided written evaluations based upon guidelines adapted from Dyches et al. (2001). These guidelines included evaluations of the portrayal of the individuals with developmental disabilities, social interactions, exemplary practices, and sibling relationships (if applicable), along with literary and artistic elements (see Table 2 for a brief synopsis of the disability-related guidelines).

The researchers then compared data from the reviewers, and compiled a quantitative and descriptive summary of each item on the evaluation instrument. When disagreement existed, two of the authors reviewed sections from the books in question and came to consensus. In addition, the authors conducted a separate analysis which included evaluation of the characterization, personal relationships, changes in characters with developmental disabilities, changes in nondisabled characters, and special topics.

One author performed an audit trail, according to the method described by Sandelowski (1986) to establish trustworthiness of the analysis method and the results. The audit trail confirmed the themes that had been identified, as agreement was shown between the authors and the auditor regarding these themes.

Results

Of the 41 books eligible for review, 13 were picture books and 28 were chapter books, with 42 characters with DD in main or supporting

TABLE 2

Sample Guidelines From the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award Rating Scale for Evaluating Children's Books

Personal Portrayal

- Portrays characteristics of DD accurately.
- Describes the character(s) with DD as realistic.
- Character(s) with DD are fully developed.
- Does not portray only disabilities of the character(s), but portrays abilities, interests, and strengths of the character(s).
- Emphasizes similarities, rather than differences, between characters with and without DD.
- Uses nondiscriminatory language that avoids stereotypic portrayals.

Social Interactions

- Depicts character(s) with DD engaging in socially and emotionally reciprocal relationships.
- Depicts acceptance of the character(s) with DD.
- Promotes empathy, not pity for the character(s) with DD.
- Portrays positive social contributions of person(s) with DD.
- Promotes respect for the character(s) with DD.

Exemplary Practices

- Depicts character(s) with DD having full citizenship opportunities in integrated settings and/or activities.
- Depicts character(s) with DD receiving services appropriate for their age, skill level, and interests.
- Depicts valued occupations for character(s) with DD (if appropriate).
- Promotes self-determination.

Sibling Relationships (if applicable)

- Sibling(s) of the character(s) with DD experience a wide range of emotions.
- Sibling(s) of the character(s) with DD have opportunities for growth that are not typical for siblings of children without DD.
- The sibling relationship is reciprocal.
- The sibling(s) are not given unusually burdensome household and family duties.
- The sibling(s) appear aware of the nature of the disability and its effects on the character with DD.

roles. Three books included more than one character with DD, but in two of them several characters were not analyzed because they were considered minor (*Accidents of Nature* and *The Decoding of Lana Morris*). In one picture book, *We Go in a Circle*, the characters with DD were analyzed as a group rather than

individually, due to the brief and non-specific nature of their characterization. A few books also included characters with other disabilities, including selective mutism, stuttering, and orthopedic impairments. A list of the books including the title, author, illustrator (if applicable), year published, and appropriate reading/interest levels is displayed in Table 3.

Themes in the Field of Developmental Disabilities

Portrayals of the 42 individuals with developmental disabilities were analyzed and categorized across four themes: (a) characterization of the individual with DD, (b) relationships among characters with and without DD, (c) changes in characters without DD, and (d) special topics related to the field of DD. Each theme will be discussed in detail, with representative examples from the various books.

Characterization

Characterizations of the individuals with DD were analyzed in terms of (a) level (main or supporting), (b) personal characteristics, (c) realistic depiction, (d) positive portrayal, (e) character development, and (f) point of view from which the story was told. Brief summaries of these characteristics are provided in Tables 4 and 5.

Level (main or supporting). Main characters are critical to the plot, often as protagonists or antagonists, while supporting characters are typically important to the growth of the main characters. Minor characters enrich the plot, but their presence is not essential to the development or resolution of the climax of the story. The level of characterization was determined as *main* in 20 characters with DD (48%), and *supporting* in 22 characters (52%). One book, *The Very Orderly Existence of Merilee Marvelous*, portrayed more than one main or supporting character with DD.

Personal characteristics. Ages of characters with developmental disabilities ranged from infant to adult. One character was an infant, 3 were pre-schoolers, 24 were elementary age children, 10 were teenagers, 2 were adults, the age of one character was not evident (*Autistic Planet*), and the supporting characters with

DD in *We Go in a Circle* appeared to be of various ages.

Of the 42 characters with developmental disabilities, 22 (52%) were individuals with autism spectrum disorders, almost half of whom ($n = 9$, 41%) had Asperger Syndrome. The remaining 20 characters with DD included those with intellectual disabilities ($n = 8$, 19%), Down syndrome ($n = 6$, 14%), unspecified developmental disabilities ($n = 3$, 7%), fetal alcohol spectrum disorder ($n = 2$, 5%) and multiple disabilities (Cerebral Palsy and intellectual disabilities; $n = 1$, 2%).

A majority of the characters with DD were males ($n = 25$, 60%). Of those exhibiting symptoms of intellectual disabilities (including Down syndrome, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, multiple disabilities, and unspecified developmental disabilities), 10 were male and 9 were female. One book, *We Go in a Circle*, included several boys and girls with various unspecified disabilities. Of the 22 characters with autism spectrum disorders, 14 were male and 8 were female.

Several books depicted characters with developmental disabilities or characters without disabilities either in illustrations or text as being from ethnically diverse cultures. However, the determination of some main or supporting characters' diversity was subjective if the text and/or illustrations were ambiguous. In this analysis, nine (21%) depictions of characters with developmental disabilities appeared to be culturally diverse, including Hispanic (*Cristina Keeps a Promise; The Duchess to the Rescue; Holy Smoke*); African American (*Accidents of Nature; Jazz Off-Key*); Asian (*Ann Drew Jackson; Jackson Whole Wyoming*), and undetermined (*Autistic Planet*). The remaining 32 characters did not give any indication of representing ethnically diverse populations, and the characters in *We Go in a Circle* were considered as a group to be mainly Caucasian.

Realistic depiction. Most of the portrayals of the characters with DD were considered to be realistic ($n = 31$, 74%) because their disabilities were similar to descriptions found in the professional literature. Portrayals that were partially realistic showed the character exhibiting many of the symptoms of the disability, but also exhibited inconsistencies in using speech or actions, or the author provided lit-

TABLE 3

Juvenile Literature with Main/Supporting Characters with DD Analyzed in this Study

Title, Author (Illustrator), Year, Reading/Interest Levels

Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Adam Canfield, Watch Your Back!*, Michael Winerip, 2007, Middle
Adam's Alternative Sports Day, Jude Welton, 2005, Middle
Al Capone Does My Shirts, Gennifer Choldenko, 2004, Middle
Ann Drew Jackson, Joan Clark (Nathan Clark), 2007, Upper Elem.
Apart, R.P. MacIntyre & Wendy MacIntyre, 2007, High School
Autistic Planet, Jennifer Elder (Marc Thomas), 2007, Lower Elem.
Baj and the Word Launcher, Pamela Victor, 2006, Upper Elem.
The Duchess to the Rescue, Alexandra Eden, 2006, Upper Elem.
The Flight of a Dove, Alexandra Day, 2004, Lower Elem.
Holy Smoke, Alexandra Eden, 2004, Upper Elem.
It's Time, Judith Mammay (Todd Fargo), 2007, Lower Elem.
Jackson Whole Wyoming, Joan Clark, 2005, Middle
Jay Grows an Alien, Caroline Anne Levine, 2007, Upper Elem.
Kickoff, Donna King, 2007, Upper Elem.
Looking after Louis, Lesley Ely (Polly Dunbar), 2004, Lower Elem.
My Best Friend Will, Jamie Lowell & Tara Tuchel, 2005, Upper Elem.
Playing by the Rules, Dena Luchsinger (Julie Olson), 2007, Lower Elem.
Rules, Cynthia Lord, 2006, Middle
Running on Dreams, Herb Heiman, 2007, Middle
Sariah McDuff Will Walk With You, Lee Ann Setzer (Bob Bonham), 2005, Upper Elem.
Sundays with Matthew, Matthew Lancelle & Jeanette Lesada, 2006, Lower Elem.
To Be Me, Rebecca Etlinger (Mark Tomassi), 2005, Upper Elem.

Down syndrome

- The Best Worst Brother*, Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen (Charlotte Fremaux), 2005, Lower Elem.
Jazz Off-Key, Dandi Daley Mackall, 2007, Upper Elem.
Me, Hailey, Sheri Plucker, (Todd Fargo), 2005, Lower Elem.
A Small White Scar, K. A. Nuzum, 2006, Middle
Sophie's Encore, Nancy Rue, 2006, Upper Elem.
The Year of My Miraculous Reappearance, Catherine Ryan Hyde, 2007, High School

Intellectual Disability

- Accidents of Nature*, Harriet McBryde Johnson, 2006, High School
Brothers, Boyfriends and Other Criminal Minds, April Lurie, 2007, High School
The Decoding of Lana Morris, Laura & Tom McNeal, 2007, High School
Hunger Moon, Sarah Lamstein, 2004, High School
Keeping Up with Roo, Sharlee Glenn (Dan Andreasen), 2004, Upper Elem.
The Silver Cup, Constance Leeds, 2007, High School
So B. It, Sarah Weeks, 2004, Middle
This Side of the Sky, Marie-Francine Hébert; translated by Susan Ouriou, 2006, High School

Multiple Disabilities

- Cruise Control*, Terry Trueman, 2004, Middle

Unspecified or Various Developmental Disabilities

- Cristina Keeps a Promise*, Virginia L. Kroll (Enrique O. Sanchez), 2006, Lower Elem.
The Moon Children, Beverley Brenna, 2007, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Upper Elem.
The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous, Suzanne Crowley, 2007, Asperger Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Middle
We Go in a Circle, Peggy Perry Anderson, 2004, Lower Elem.
-

the information by which the portrayal could be judged. For example, in *Brothers, Boyfriends and Other Criminal Minds*, Larry, a 14-year old

boy with an intellectual disability, had previously been educated in a special school, but once he entered his neighborhood general

TABLE 4

Characterizations in Picture Books

<i>Book</i>	<i>Character(s)</i>	<i>Personal Characteristics</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Depiction</i>	<i>Portrayal</i>	<i>Character Development</i>	<i>Point of View</i>
<i>Autistic Planet</i>	Unnamed	Female Autism	Main	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Unnamed female with Autism
<i>The Best Worst Brother</i>	Isaac	3-year old male Down syndrome	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Slightly Dynamic	Older sister, Emma
<i>Cristina Keeps a Promise</i>	Victor	Elementary age male Unspecified Developmental Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Slightly Dynamic	Narrator
<i>The Flight of a Dove</i>	Betsy	3-4 year old female Autism	Main	Partially Realistic	Mixed	Slightly Dynamic	Narrator
<i>It's Time</i>	Tommy	Second grade male Autism	Main	Realistic	Negative	Static	Narrator
<i>Keeping Up with Roo</i>	Aunt Roo (Ruth)	Adult female Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Narrator
<i>Looking after Louis</i>	Louis	Elementary age male Autism	Main	Realistic	Mixed	Slightly Dynamic	Girl in Louis's class
<i>Me, Hailey</i>	Hailey	Kindergarten female Down syndrome	Main	Realistic	Positive	Static	Narrator
<i>My Best Friend Will</i>	Will	Elementary age male Autism	Main	Realistic	Mixed	Static	5 th grade girl, Jamie
<i>Playing by the Rules</i>	Josh	Elementary age male Autism	Main	Neutral	Mixed	Static	Sister, Jody
<i>Sundays with Matthew</i>	Matthew	11-year old male Autism	Main	Realistic	Positive	Static	Art therapist, Jeanette
<i>To Be Me</i>	David	10-year old male Asperger Syndrome	Main	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	David
<i>We Go in a Circle</i>	Several children	Various Developmental Disabilities	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Injured race horse

education school, he demonstrated an extraordinary ability to play the drums and was soon included in a rock band.

Positive portrayal. Portrayals of characters with DD were characterized as positive if they were judged to meet most or all of the following values that guide interactions with and services provided to individuals with disabilities: (a) realistic emphasis on strengths rather than weaknesses, (b) high expectations, (c) making positive contributions beyond promoting growth in other characters, (d) becoming self-determined, (e) being given full citizenship in the home and community, and

(f) expanding reciprocal relationships (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Of the 42 characters portrayed, 17 (40.5%) were judged to be positive. Characterizations were described as being *mixed* if some of the attributes of positive characterizations were present ($n = 17, 40.5\%$) and *negative* if these characterizations were rarely shown ($n = 8, 19\%$).

Most of the books mentioned or alluded to the strengths of the characters with DD; however, only a few authors used these strengths to contribute to the plot of the story. One example of the portrayal of strengths is Verity Buscador, a teenage girl with Asperger Syn-

TABLE 5

Characterizations in Chapter Books

<i>Book</i>	<i>Character(s)</i>	<i>Personal Characteristics</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Depiction</i>	<i>Portrayal</i>	<i>Character Development</i>	<i>Point of View</i>
<i>Accidents of Nature</i>	Margie	Teenage female Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Camper, Jean
<i>Adam Canfield, Watch Your Back!</i>	Theodore (Shadow)	Middle school male Unspecified Developmental Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Positive	Static	Narrator
<i>Adam's Alternative Sports Day</i>	Adam	9-year old male Asperger Syndrome	Main	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Narrator
<i>Al Capone Does My Shirts</i>	Natalie	15-year old female Autism	Supporting	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Younger brother, Moose
<i>Ann Drew Jackson</i>	Jackson	Fifth grade male Asperger Syndrome	Main	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Classmate, Hillary
<i>Apart</i>	Timmy	10-year old male Autism	Supporting	Partially Realistic	Negative	Static	Older sister, Jess and Sween
<i>Bag and the Word Launcher</i>	Bag	Elementary age male Asperger Syndrome	Main	Partially Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Narrator
<i>Brothers, Boyfriends, and Other</i>	Larry	14-year old male Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Partially Realistic	Mixed	Dynamic	Neighbor, April
<i>Criminal Minds Cruise Control</i>	Shawn	14-year old male Multiple Disabilities	Supporting	Realistic	Negative	Static	Older brother, Paul
<i>The Decoding of Lana Morris</i>	Tilly	16-year old female Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Positive	Static	Narrator
<i>The Duchess to the Rescue</i>	Verity	12-year old female Asperger Syndrome	Main	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Officer, Bones
<i>Holy Smoke</i>	Verity	12-year old female Asperger Syndrome	Main	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Officer, Bones
<i>Hunger Moon</i>	Eddy	Elementary-age male Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Older sister, Ruthie
<i>Jackson Whole Wyoming</i>	Jackson	Fifth grade male Asperger Syndrome	Supporting	Realistic	Positive	Static	Friend, Tyler

(continued)

TABLE 5

Continued

<i>Book</i>	<i>Character(s)</i>	<i>Personal Characteristics</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Depiction</i>	<i>Portrayal</i>	<i>Character Development</i>	<i>Point of View</i>
<i>Joy Grows an Alien</i>	Jay	Elementary-age male Asperger Syndrome	Main	Realistic	Positive	Slightly Dynamic	Narrator
<i>Jazz Off-Key</i>	Kendra	13-year old female Down Syndrome	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Narrator
<i>Kickoff</i>	Shirelle	5-year old female ADD, possibly autism	Supporting	Partially Realistic	Negative	Static	Narrator
<i>The Moon Children</i>	Billy	11-year old male Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	Main	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Narrator
<i>Rules</i>	David	8-year old male Autism	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Static	Older sister, Catherine
<i>Running on Dreams</i>	Justin	15-year old male Autism	Main	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Justin & Narrator
<i>Sariah McDuff Will Walk With You</i>	Chrissy	Elementary-age female Autism	Main	Realistic	Mixed	Slightly Dynamic	Sariah
<i>The Silver Cup</i>	Thomas	6-year old male Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Negative	Static	Narrator
<i>A Small White Scar</i>	Denny	15-year old male Down syndrome	Supporting	Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Twin brother, Will
<i>So B. It</i>	Sofia	Adult female Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Realistic	Positive	Static	Daughter, Heidi
<i>Sophie's Encore</i>	Hope	Infant female Down syndrome	Supporting	Partially Realistic	Mixed	Static	Narrator
<i>This Side of the Sky</i>	Angélique	8-year old female Intellectual Disability	Supporting	Partially Realistic	Mixed	Static	Older sister, Mona
<i>The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee</i>	Merilee	13-year old female Asperger Syndrome	Main	Partially Realistic	Positive	Dynamic	Merilee
<i>Marvelous</i>	Biswick	8-year old male Fetal Alcohol Disorder	Supporting	Partially Realistic	Positive	Static	Merilee
<i>The Year of My Miraculous Reappearance</i>	Bill	3-year old male Down syndrome	Supporting	Realistic	Mixed	Slightly Dynamic	Older sister, Cynnie

drome in *The Duchess to the Rescue*, who used her computer skills to help identify who painted graffiti in town.

When expectations were set high for the characters, those portrayed positively were able to meet them. For example, Natalie, a 15-year old girl in *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, is expected to learn to speak better and interact appropriately with other children so she will be allowed to attend a special school, which was a privilege rather than a right in the 1930s.

Many of the characters made positive contributions to their families, and some even contributed to their schools and communities. Although most of these contributions were not intentional, such as providing circumstances whereby others can learn patience, tolerance, and compassion, some contributions were intentionally made by the character with DD. For example, Aunt Ruth (Roo) a woman with an intellectual disability in *Keeping Up with Roo*, taught her niece how to read. Also, Verity, a 12-year old girl with Asperger Syndrome, makes critical contributions toward solving cases in *The Duchess to the Rescue* and *Holy Smoke*.

Although most characters with DD made some attempts toward becoming more self-determined, most of their choices did not make much of an impact on the story or on the characters' development. For example, characters with DD often chose to engage in their favorite activities, such as watching TV or videos. On the other hand, many characters were given opportunities to make important, life-altering choices. One notable example of this positive characteristic was found in *A Small White Scar*, when Denny made the bold decision to follow his brother off the ranch, and continue on horseback into the wilderness.

Many characters with DD were depicted as having age-appropriate citizenship rights in their families, schools, and communities. For example, in *Adam Canfield*, Watch Your Back, Shadow, a middle school boy with an unspecified developmental disability, becomes part of the journalism staff alongside peers without disabilities. Further, the characters with Asperger Syndrome and high functioning autism were most frequently shown to have similar rights as those similar to their age, being included with nondisabled peers in general

education environments, recreational activities, and work settings (*Autistic Planet*, *It's Time*, *Looking After Louis*, *My Best Friend Will*, *To Be Me*, *Adam's Alternative Sports Day*, *Ann Drew Jackson*, *Baj and the Word Launcher*, *The Duchess to the Rescue*, *Holy Smoke*, *Jackson Whole Wyoming*, *Jay Grows an Alien*, *Running on Dreams*, *The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous*).

Character development. Character development in a story helps readers relate to and learn from the characters' experiences. Characters in children's literature are developed through their actions, relationships with others, their sense of themselves, and the roles they play in the plot (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 2002). Dynamic characters are important because they develop or grow through the story, while static characters show no growth. In many stories including characters with disabilities, growth occurs primarily for characters without disabilities. However, characters with DD should not be included in a story only to evoke growth in others, but they should learn and grow, even if their development is slow or difficult to detect (e.g., Betsy, a 3-year old girl with autism trying to talk in *The Flight of a Dove*, Victor winning a Special Olympics race in *Cristina Keeps a Promise*). Of the 42 characters with DD portrayed, 24 (57%) were identified as dynamic, and the remaining were classified as static. Some of the changes in character with DD include: learning to communicate and socialize better (e.g., *Al Capone Does My Shirts*; *Baj and the Word Launcher*; *It's Time*; *Looking After Louis*; *Playing by the Rules*; *The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous*), using personal strengths to solve problems (e.g., *The Duchess to the Rescue*; *Holy Smoke*), successfully venturing out beyond familiar territory (e.g., *A Small White Scar*), and developing new talents or skills (e.g. *Brothers, Boyfriends, and Other Criminal Minds*; *The Moon Children*; *Running on Dreams*).

Point of view. Most of the stories were told from the point of view of a family member, usually a sibling, or a peer. In one unique book, the family member was the daughter of a woman with DD (*So B. It*). However, some of the stories ($n = 4$; 10%) were told from the point of view of the individual with DD (*Autistic Planet*; *To Be Me*; *Running on Dreams*; *The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous*). *Running on Dreams* was uniquely told from the

perspective of both Jason, a 15-year old boy with autism, and a narrator. The remaining stories were told by a narrator.

Relationships among Characters With and Without Developmental Disabilities

In reciprocal relationships each party contributes, learns, and grows from their association. However, often in books containing characters with DD, relationships are one-sided, with the character with a disability being the recipient of care, being watched after, and the presence of their disability is the primary change agent for another's growth. In this study, some levels of social reciprocity were found between several characters ($n = 19$, 45%). For example, David, a 10-year old boy with Asperger Syndrome in *To Be Me*, indicates that he is friends with the students in his class, "even those who wear glasses." In *The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous*, Merilee, a 13-year old girl with Asperger Syndrome, befriends a newcomer to town, Biswick, an 8-year old boy with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The books were evaluated to determine the nature of the relationships found between characters with DD and others. The following were examined: (a) primary relationship, (b) victim, perpetrator, and/or protector, (c) dependent or caregiver, (d) pupil or instructor. Of the 42 characters depicted, most had primary relationships with their families ($n = 20$, 48%), followed by friends ($n = 18$, 43%, with 72% of those friends not having disabilities), and paid personnel or volunteers ($n = 5$, 12%). Eighteen characters with DD (43%) were depicted as victims, usually of teasing, name calling, and ridicule, but occasionally of abuse or neglect (e.g., *Hunger Moon*; *The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous*; *The Year of My Miraculous Reappearance*). While most were shown being dependent upon others, in five cases, individuals with DD were caregivers (12%; i.e., *Accidents of Nature*, *The Duchess to the Rescue*, *Holy Smoke*, *Jay Grows an Alien*, *The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous*). In two of these instances, care is given to people without disabilities (*The Duchess to the Rescue*; *Holy Smoke*). Finally, 10 characters assumed the role of informal teacher, usually by teaching others about something related to their disability (e.g., *Autistic Planet*; *Me, Hailey*; *To Be Me*). In

one book, an aunt with DD teaches her niece how to read (*Keeping Up with Roo*).

Changes in Characters without Developmental Disabilities

In many books, main or supporting characters without disabilities learned to accept or understand the individual with DD ($n = 19$, 46%), yet most just maintained their feelings and attitudes ($n = 22$, 54%), which were generally positive. One book depicted an increase in negative feelings by a significant nondisabled character toward the character with DD (set in the 1060s, Thomas, a 6-year old boy with an intellectual disability is abandoned in the woods by his mother in *The Silver Cup*).

Special Topics

The books were also examined for treatment of special topics in the field of developmental disability, including: (a) schooling and education, (b) recreation, (c) residence, and (d) family characteristics.

Schooling and education. Elements of school life for school-aged characters with DD were evident in 24 books. The types of school settings varied along a continuum of placements including no schooling (e.g., *The Silver Cup*—set in the 1060s, *A Small White Scar*—set in the 1950s, *This Side of the Sky*—era undetermined), boarding school (e.g., *Al Capone Does My Shirts*—set in the 1930s), special schools (e.g., *The Flight of a Dove*, *Jazz Off Key*; *Sariah McDuff Will Walk With You*); special classrooms within general education schools (e.g., *Adam Canfield*, *Watch Your Back*; *Brothers, Boyfriends, and Other Criminal Minds*; *Cruise Control*; *Running on Dreams*), and general education classrooms with various levels of support (e.g., *It's Time*; *Jackson Whole Wyoming*; *Jay Grows an Alien*; *Looking After Louis*; *Me, Hailey*; *To Be Me*). The most frequently depicted educational placement was inclusionary settings ($n = 13$, 54%).

Recreation. Individuals with DD engaged in recreational activities, usually as informal events (e.g., playing on computers, making art, playing chess, listening to music, playing with blocks, watching TV). Very few formal activities were included in the stories, and when they were included, they were organized for groups of people with disabilities (e.g.,

Special Olympics). Most of the recreational activities mentioned involved peers or siblings (e.g., *Autistic Planet*, *Keeping Up with Roo*, *Looking After Louis*, *My Best Friend Will*, *To Be Me*, *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, *This Side of the Sky*) rather than solitary activities.

Residence. In the books where residence was depicted, all main and supporting characters with DD lived in their family home, except for characters in *The Decoding of Lana Morris* (Tilly and other minor characters with DD live in a foster home) and *Apart* (Timmy, a 10-year old boy with autism is sent to live in a group home).

Family characteristics. Various types of families were depicted in the books, but primarily the characters with DD lived in traditional families (e.g., mother and father at home). However, some lived with single parents (e.g., divorced or widowed), or foster parents. Siblings were portrayed in many of the families, and were often the primary caregivers of the individuals with DD. The book, *So B. It*, is an exceptional illustration of a family situation. In this book the character with a developmental disability, Sofia, is cared for by her daughter who does not have a disability.

Discussion

Children's books in this study were evaluated to determine how characters with developmental disabilities are portrayed to young readers. Specifically, four topics were evaluated: (a) characterization of the individual with DD, (b) relationships between the character with DD and others, (c) changes in characters without DD, and (d) special topics related to DD. Results of this analysis will be discussed and compared to two previous studies of children's books that include characters with DD (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Dyches et al., 2001).

This study analyzed 41 books that included main or supporting characters with developmental disabilities published between 2004 and 2007. Annually, this rate of publication is 10.25 books per year, which is an increase from 2005 (8.5 per year) and 2001 (6 per year). The criteria for inclusion in this current evaluation excluded several books which were self-published or included non-human characters with developmental disabilities, and no

such exclusions existed in the previous studies. Therefore, we can conclude that more commercially-published books with human characters with developmental disabilities are being published than in the recent past.

Books in this study depicted characters with several types of developmental disabilities, with the proportion of characters with intellectual disabilities decreasing from 75% in 2001 to 47% in 2005, and 48% in this study, and characters with autism spectrum disorders increasing from 25% in 2001 to 53% in 2005, and 52% in this study. This representation is disproportionate to reported enrollment of school-aged children with these disabilities in the U.S., where students with mental retardation represent 9.6% of the special education population, and autism represents only 2.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). However, the recent increase in children's fiction that features characters with autism spectrum disorders may be reflecting the recent media attention to the significant increase in children with this diagnosis with a rate of 6 per 10,000 for autism, Asperger Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified combined (Dyches, in press). Also, in the present study almost half ($n = 9$, 41%) of the characters with autism spectrum disorders were portrayed specifically as having Asperger Syndrome. Of the 20 characters identified with intellectual disabilities or unspecified developmental disabilities, only 6 (30%) had Down syndrome, down from 53% in 2005 and 64% in 2001. The books in this study also included characters with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Multiple Disabilities, which were previously not represented.

More male characters than females with DD were depicted in the books reviewed; however, the trend is decreasing (from 86% in 2001 to 87% in 2005, and 61% in this study). A decreasing trend was found in males with intellectual disabilities from 86% in 2001 to 78% in 2005 and only 58% in the present study. The current percentage is lower than actual proportions of those with intellectual disabilities in the U.S. population (1.5 male to 1 female) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Results indicate a decreasing trend of males with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). All characters with ASD in 2001 were male, de-

creasing to 84% in 2005 and 64% in the current study. This most recent proportion of males to females is low, based upon the estimated population ratio for autism being 4–5 boys to 1 girl (75–80%) and at least 5 times higher (80%) for Asperger Syndrome (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

There was an increase of characters with DD from diverse cultures in this set of books compared to the previous studies, from no characters in 2001 to 14% in 2005 and 21% in the present study. This representation gives readers more realistic perceptions of how developmental disabilities may affect people from all races, cultures, and ethnicities. Current U.S. Census (2004) estimates the population to be 81% White alone (not in combination with another race), 12.7% Black, 12.6% from Hispanic origin, and 3.8% Asian. In the nine books that feature culturally diverse main or supporting characters with DD, Hispanics and Blacks are underrepresented—each with 7% of the 42 characters. Conversely, Asians are slightly overrepresented with 5% of the characters. However, these data should be treated with caution since in some cases the authors and illustrators did not distinctly indicate race or culture of their characters with DD.

Several dimensions of the characterizations of individuals with DD varied across the three studies. Generally, there was an increasing trend of positive portrayals, from 71% of the depictions judged to be positive in 2001, to 72% in 2005, and 81% in the current study. These portrayals were more positive in part because over time the characters were increasingly more self-determined and enjoyed more reciprocal relationships with a wider range of people. While characters in the present study had primary relationships with fewer friends than in the 2005 study, two-thirds of these friendships were with nondisabled peers.

The characters with DD who were victimized increased from the 2005 study (from 39% to 43%), but this rate was far below that of the 2001 study (83%). Most of the victimization occurred by teasing or name calling, and a new derogatory term was introduced in *The Decoding of Lana Morris*, Snicks (an acronym for “Special Needs Kids” or “SNKs”).

More characters with DD were depicted as having important roles in society, either as informal teachers (24% in the current study,

an increase from the previous studies), or as caregivers (12% in the current study, also an increase). Their teaching often went beyond teaching about their disability, to teaching skills and information to others.

Finally, characters with DD were portrayed in increasingly inclusionary recreational activities over the past three studies, including activities such as making art, playing chess, listening to music, and playing with friends. The educational environments for the last study were inclusionary in 46% of the instances, and for the current study it increased to 54%. This level of inclusion is higher than reported in national school data (U.S. Department of Education, 2007), where 43.9% of the students with autism and 51.8% of the students with intellectual disabilities spent greater than 60% of their time outside of the general education classroom. The high level of inclusion portrayed in the books may be explained by the eight students with Asperger Syndrome being educated in inclusionary environments, while only five other characters with DD were educated in general education settings.

Conclusions

More commercially-published children’s fiction that features individuals with developmental disabilities is available than in the past. The depictions of these individuals represent a trend of increasing cultural diversity. Also, the proportion of books including characters with ASD is overrepresented based upon national school-based data, in comparison to the underrepresentation of characters with intellectual disabilities.

Previously, male characters with intellectual disabilities were overrepresented, but in the current study, they were underrepresented. Similarly, males with ASD are underrepresented in the present study.

The characters with DD have been depicted more multidimensionally across the past decade. An increasing trend for these depictions to represent more positive portrayals with individuals being more self-determined, engaging in more caregiving and teaching roles, and enjoying more inclusionary recreational activities is positive. This upward trend meets each of the charges given to authors of children’s books in 2005 by Dyches and Prater to

“add depth and multidimensionality to the characters that they portray” (p. 515). Future authors are encouraged to include a more representative sample of characters with intellectual disabilities, more realistic depictions of characters with developmental disabilities, and more characters who make important decisions for their lives which show their self-determination.

Educational services providers are encouraged to seek out quality literature that contains images of children with disabilities who are seen as “people whom readers would like to know or be friends with” (Smith-D’Arezzo, 2003, p. 76). These books should express the values they intend to teach, thereby shaping the “evolving moral character of its readers” (Mills, 2002, p. 531). The current study provides an analysis of 41 books, based upon values often depicted in the professional literature, and the results can serve as a guide for selecting books that include individuals with developmental disabilities.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Blaska, J. K. (2003). *Using children’s literature to learn about disabilities and illnesses* (2nd ed.). Moorhead, MN: Practical Press.
- R. R. Bowker’s Database Publishing Group. (2007). *Children’s books in print 2008: An author, title, and illustrator index to books for children and young adults*. New Providence, NJ: R. R. Bowker.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dyches, T. T. (in press). Educating Children with Autism and Related Disorders in E. Baker, B. McGaw, and P. Peterson (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Education: Special Education* (3rd ed.). Elsevier Limited.
- Dyches, T. T., & Prater, M. A. (2000). *Developmental disability in children’s literature: Issues and annotated bibliography*. Reston, VA: The Division on Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children.
- Dyches, T. T., & Prater, M. A. (2005). Characterization of developmental disability in children’s fiction. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 40*, 202–216.
- Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Cramer, S. F. (2001). Characterization of mental retardation and autism in children’s books. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 36*, 230–243.
- Heim, A. B. (1994). Beyond the stereotypes: Characters with mental disabilities in children’s books. *School Library Journal, 40*, 139–142.
- Lukens, R. J. (2007). *A critical handbook of children’s literature* (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.
- Mills, C. (2002). The portrayal of mental disability in children’s literature: An ethical appraisal, *Horn Book Magazine, 78*, 531–642.
- Prater, M. A. (1999). Characterization of mental retardation in children’s and adolescent literature. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 34*, 418–431.
- Prater, M. A., & Dyches, T. T. (2008). *Teaching about disabilities through children’s literature*. Westport, CN: Libraries Unlimited.
- Sandelowski, M. (1986). The problem of rigor in qualitative research. *Advances in Nursing Science, 8*, 27–37.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing and Health, 23*, 334–340.
- Sawyer, W. E. (2009). *Growing up with literature* (5th ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Delmar.
- Smith-D’Arezzo, W. M. (2003). Diversity in children’s literature: Not just a black and white issue. *Children’s Literature in Education, 34*(1), 75–94.
- Temple, C., Martinez, M., Yokota, J., & Naylor, A. (2002). *Children’s books in children’s hands: An introduction to their literature* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2007). *Exceptional lives: Special Education in Today’s Schools* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2004) *U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin*. Retrieved December 1, 2008 from www.census.gov/population/www/projections/usinterimproj/natprojtab01a.pdf
- U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs (2007). *The Twenty-seventh annual (2005) report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.