

## Children's Literature: Shaping the vision of Disability.

Swermon Swer<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Kumar Gautam Anand<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Reserach Scholar, Department of English, Sharda School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida,

Email: Swermon123@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sharda School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe how unbiased stories depicting children with disabilities are used in elementary schools to describe multicultural perspectives. A multicultural approach will benefit the teaching of social acceptance as opposed to separating people into groups. There are many books for children which wins award and discuss disabilities that are written by well-meaning authors, but sadly, their stories are not true to life and do not really provide a sense of what it is like to have a disability. The omission of facts in popular books, and the promotion of stereotypes about individuals with disabilities that have their roots in many culture, unintended result of people dehumanizing involve. A teacher should make use of his or her creativity to create meaningful literature-based experiences that will appeal to the students. In addition to discussing the content of the story, one can extend the discussion to other topics related to the curriculum. It is important for teachers, parents, librarians, and students to recognize some blatant signs, as well as some more subtle signs, to look for a book about children's disabilities.

**Keywords:** *disability, books for children, teaching, popular culture.*

### Introduction:

We can talk about a story of a blind little girl. [1] Before starting the story, a teacher may introduce the story very well to students who do not have disabilities, with the expectation that we are heading for a tale filled with compassion, maybe even a miracle recovery, and perhaps even a dog that can see. When a culture's experience is omitted, misrepresented, and distorted in popular entertainment, such as films, television shows, and books, dehumanizing its people is an inevitable consequence of these practices [1].

In the opinion of any teacher who is responsible, one would ask, "Why do you have to say, 'This is a blind girl's story' [1][3] Could you not instead say, 'This is a story about a little girl who'" You should not use a story if it contains a message that is not relevant to the classroom. There is a need to explain how children's literature can be used in curriculum and instruction to provide children with an understanding of anti-bias perspectives that is fair and understandable to them as well as their teachers [2]. In particular, literature about disabilities will be used to demonstrate ways in which this generalization about other people can be refuted and discouraged, instead of being understood and accepted [2][3]. A study was also done to get to know about the attitude of students and teachers in multicultural classroom for students with disabilities.

### Education for multiculturalism

A melting pot is no longer the best word to describe the American educational system today. In every classroom there are different types of students with different lifestyles [1][5]. Unlike many other parts of the world, there is a low degree of cultural diversity in American classrooms. In order for multicultural education to be effective, the thrust should be for students to discover and appreciate each and every ingredient in a salad. The design of an effective classroom that encourages students to accept different viewpoints is one way in which critical thinking can be taught effectively [3].

There has been a gradual shift in the way that school curriculum relates to multicultural education, yet there is no single program that epitomizes it. There are several points that need to be considered if we are to achieve a successful cross-cultural approach, which includes treating other cultures with respect, eradicating racism, teaching multicultural content, and understanding the world from a variety of perspectives[4].Believed that influencing the culture of the classroom should enrich both teachers and students through the process of cultural composition and interaction. The definition of multicultural education by James Stanley is as follows: [3][5]"...the education of all students should be made fair and equal regardless of their group membership, whether they are female or male, regardless of their ethnicity or race, regardless of their racial background, regardless of their social class, regardless of their religion, or regardless of their exceptionalities." [4][5].

Developing multicultural education goes beyond simply educating about other countries or groups, which is perhaps the simplest part of multicultural education. There is a variety of reasons why schools should strive to create an inclusive educational atmosphere [5]. One reason is to enable students to become more knowledgeable about themselves or to enable them to develop critical thinking skills as they engage in thinking about the ideas

and ideas they hold about the world and how they live, speak, and think [5][6]. For teachers, the challenge is to provide a foundation that promotes multicultural understanding, which in turn will enable all students to learn to accept others as they are. The following questions can help educators determine how effective they are, in terms of achieving their multicultural goals [4]:

- The question I would like to ask, however, is whether any efforts have been made to know and respect diversity of cultural among learners. Can we have the challenge as a gift not as a reckoned challenge?
- There has been an effort made to create an atmosphere in the classroom in which students are free to discuss their thoughts. This has allowed them to stand up for what they believe in.
- Is the decor and artwork in the classroom an indication of a respect for cultural diversity, or does it show a valuing or appreciation of only one culture? The artwork, boards of bulletin, and walls in the classroom, do they indicate a similar attitude or respect?
- In the course of teaching students' cross-cultural skills, how have they been permitted to join and work for different cultural group, continue fruitful conversation and communication and feel worthy as a group member?
- Is there evidence that there have been numerous attempts to treat all students in the class equally, as valuable members of the class, and as worthwhile members of the class?

Educators should respect the skills of young learners in the areas of thinking, speaking, reading, and acting [7][9]. Education should take into consideration the ability of students to comprehend, and construct meanings relating to the contexts in which they live, and to communicate that meaning in the context. That is what education should aim to achieve and that is what education should be [7].

In order for multicultural perspectives to be incorporated in education, parents and teacher should teach social acceptance to the children of elementary school, without being separated as trend, rather than being separated as they are raised [8]. A sense of belonging can be a very powerful factor when it comes to influencing future achievements in these crucial years of development. Promoting a positive self-concept is a very important element of child development. This must be accompanied by activities that demonstrate how the lives of all children are similar and different. In order for children to be treated as unique individuals who can contribute something special to everyone's experience, it should be treated as such. It is crucial that a child has the feeling of being connected to others in order to accept their similarities and differences [8][10].

#### **Multicultural Education and Children's Literature:**

A new interpretation of the dictum holds that in order to truly learn about life, we must approach the subject from a multifaceted perspective, which includes reading and writing in varied forms, as well as thinking intellectually and emotionally. Through reading stories about characters, children are able to gain an understanding of what it means to be human as one of the first steps towards understanding themselves [6][9]. By examining the lives of the characters in the story, the child makes connections with the child's life and the world around him or her. A child who is fond of pretension and who has a talent for imagination will be able to reach out and see what he or she could become as they grow up [7].

In Kindergarten and Primary Grades, it is suggested to use literature of children as an important medium in which to introduce students to the principles of similarity, difference, prejudice, and discrimination in a straightforward manner [8]. Children, teachers, and professional authors tell stories that bring to life deftly written characters that enter the classroom to share with children their own experiences as well as point of views, all while bringing new life experiences and perspectives. Children's Multi ethnic Book would best serve the purpose of allowing children to relate to themselves as they see themselves reflected in literature. [8-11]. Intended to demonstrate how literature of children may get used for acquiring abilities, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to practice citizenship in a democratic society, the writer discusses how it can serve as a springboard. According to [9] "Books open doors to ideas." His conclusion sums up these thoughts.



*Figure 1: Disability in class (Source: 23)*



Figure 2: Disabilities and importance of education (Source:25)

**Teachers and Students attitude towards children with disabilities:**

The topic of disability came up in the context of the diverse classroom and a survey was conducted. Kids were asked if any of their classes had students with special needs. The sample from UK had largest percentage of learners reporting to the classrooms included individuals with impairments (40.7 percent). In Ireland (21.2%) and Spain (19.2%), around a fifth of students indicated they had classmates with impairments in their classrooms. In Latvia, Italy, and France, only a small percentage of students reported having pupils with impairments in the courses (9.6 percent in Latvia, 6.4 percent in Italy and only 1.8 percent in France). All nations together accounted for 16.7% of the total. As previously stated, the proportion is just suggestive of the samples in every nation; they are not indicative of the entire population.

When it came to views toward disabled students in classroom, a similar pattern appeared, with students being less likely than instructors to see challenges when handicapped students were present. Students, like previously, who have impaired pupils 'never' creates problems than it did in the past.

Only 33.6 percent of their professors indicated this 'never' created problems. A country-by-country analysis reveals that having students with impairments increases the likelihood of success. Be considered more troublesome in Latvia (mean = 2.6) and the United Kingdom (mean = 1.8) than in the United States the remaining four nations, with averages ranging from 1.0 in France to 1.5 in Ireland ( $F = 5.88; p \leq .001$ ) (see Table 1). It should be remembered that the United Kingdom sample had the best results number of students reporting having classmates with impairments in their classrooms (40.7 percent), with Latvia having one of the lowest rates (9.6 percent). As a result, the UK's significantly higher. The average score may represent genuine issues with pupils with impairments, although the Latvian average score may not. The higher the score, the more probable it is that you are anticipating troubles genuine difficulties This view would be consistent with earlier Latvian findings. Even when various groups were not present, which concerns were much more to be feared or just a few were there [21].

Country	Students (n = 137)
France	1.0
Spain	1.2
UK	1.8
Italy	1.0
Ireland	1.5
Latvia	2.6
$F = 5.88; p < .001$	
(1 = never; 5 = always)	

Table 1: According to country students perception about presence of students with disabilities.

**Anti-bias Curriculum Development:**

There is no doubt that the stereotypes of disability are prevalent in modern culture. Both non-disabled teachers and non-disabled students are susceptible to them. There are a good number of educators today who have been influenced by characters like Mara in Heidi, Beauty and the Beast or The Huntsman of Notre Dame while growing up. It is important that teachers ask themselves whether they think the characters were evil, funny grotesque, or weird when they first saw it [8][9].

As described by [11], the "tourist approach" is a common method of teaching about disabilities that is not appropriate. When a student or tourist visits a destination, he or she sees only the extravagant features of the place [11]. Miseducation occurs when students are taught something that doesn't necessarily correspond to what the teacher was intended to teach. There should never be a portrayal of the cultures of minority groups as entertainment, nor should the histories of victimized people be presented as painful entertainment [11]. By doing so, we teach simplistic generalizations that lead to misunderstandings and prejudice in society. As teachers, we should be mindful of the need to replace one unrealistic aspect of handicapped, unloved people with a modern image of those as beautiful and "just like them"[12-14].

We need to understand that the attitudes of people with disabilities are a natural consequence of their experiences. People with disabilities may be sensitive, compassionate, or even angry or bitter as a result of their experiences. It would be wrong, would be Slavin's standpoint, if we only told a story that "validated and celebrated the pain and oppression of the oppressed" to show ourselves as compassionate by nature or angry at ourselves for being oppressed, instead of the forces in control" [7].

In the future, teachers may acquire better knowledge and attitudes towards the disable students[11]. Using this knowledge, educators can develop curriculums that challenge students to engage in critical thinking skills necessary for multicultural education and multicultural understanding.



*Figure 3: Multiculturalism and disability (Source: 24)*

### **Teaching about disabilities through stories:**

To implement storytelling into interdisciplinary learning, teachers introduce various creative teaching techniques. To be an effective teacher, one must simply be aware of students' self-perception, and they must take into account their acquired knowledge and skills. In the introduction to the paper, it was outlined that a narrative should be considered valuable regardless of whether or not it is supposed to portray a child with a disability [10][12]. Among other things, these stories remind students to recognize character changes, settings, and themes in order to develop moods, themes, and conflict in their lives. It is therefore vital that these concepts be able to be communicated not only through colors, design, and setting, but also through illustrations [11].

There can be no better way than incorporating picture books into the language arts curriculum. Using the vivid pictures, students are able to create their own texts and interpretations using the vivid images [8][9]. Discussions can be developed to expand the study beyond the story and into different curriculum as a result of the study. In the story being read, students could, for example, learn about adaptive recreational activities that match the story. It is the teacher's responsibility to determine the level of awareness that each student holds in relation to anti-bias issues, and decide specific anti-bias topics to study. It is suggested that in order to get started thinking, you can use techniques such as role plays, interviews, or stories [9]. Barry Head and Jim Seguin's novel, *Who Am I*, has the possibility of being a meaningful story for this theme. Students brainstorm activities related to the deaf community that would help fill in the knowledge gaps about the deaf community. There is a young girl named *Who Am I*, who struggles every day with hearing loss. She loves to hug her mother, play with friends, and going to school [9].

The hearing aid is properly visible in most photographs and it is considered as an ordinary piece of gear. You can have students discuss questions such as how she has managed to live happily with the limitations placed upon her by the disability. [7-10]. Due to the lack of text in the story, the children must rely on visual cues inside the book to understand what the story is about. The students can share how they are feeling regarding the idea of relying on visual cues to assist with orienting themselves, just like deaf people do. Vandercook describes the program as one that is designed to "assist educators in creating classroom communities where all children are valued members and, as a result, feel good about themselves in addition to enjoying a sense of belonging" [6].

In this program called "Lessons of Inclusion," is introduced through children's literature, questions are addressed, and activities are provided [11]. This is a long-term project that will help students be mindful and with an attitude of collaboration with others that goes beyond the classroom walls. Each lesson focuses on a



different kind of awareness and attitude, focusing on four themes: "Including Everyone: We all Need a Home," "Liking Myself: Self-Esteem is Important," "Making and Keeping Friends: Everyone Needs a Friend," and "Cooperating With Others: Together We Can Do It." [12]

There is a need for teachers to provide experiences based on literature in order to facilitate meaningful conversations between students. Creating a positive peer relationship among children with varying abilities is one of the benefits of children's literature. Through sharing their experiences, students could build a sense of belonging in the classroom. In cooperative activities, children may be able to develop an understanding of their individual strengths and limitations by sharing their personal responses to books [12]. In order to accommodate children of different levels of ability, the teacher suggests letting the children play with friends. It is a collaborative project in which everyone is part of. Story webs can be created by focusing cooperative activities around a main theme which links to a story. In order to make a story web, you should first place the title of the story at the top of the page [15][17].

The second part of the process involves putting under the heading "Story" a list of categories relating to the story (e.g. setting, characters) and connecting them with lines. In the process of discussing their responses to the story, the student and teacher build the web with each other and add more and more information as they added it. Events in the web then became a point of discussion and collaboration between the teacher and students [18]. A study unit is almost limitless when it comes to the possibilities available. Teacher motivation is essential because it affects what is taught and how it is taught as a result of their own perspectives, values, and styles of teaching [19][20].



*Figure 4: Learning disability in classroom( Source: 22)*

### **Conclusion:**

A growing need to develop and publish standard story books on disabilities has led to groups developing and publishing unit, books, audiovisual material, games, and teacher's guides that address the issue. "A Guide to Children's Literature and Disability," is a bibliography produced several times a year by the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICYW). Several lists of books for children are provided, each organized into either categorized categories or according to a specific disability: severe or life-threatening conditions, learning disabilities, blindness, Cerebral Palsy, deafness, Down Syndrome, deafness, impairment and other disabilities. Each of the book listings is accompanied by a brief description of the book's age or grade level. It was developed by [15] that a system of evaluating books for children could be developed to evaluate a book's accessibility and stereotypes.

There is a list of 43 books that she has recommended for ages pre-kindergarten up to high school. This guide truly illustrates how books have the ability to either convey positive messages, or they can convey negative messages. There is a non-profit organization that provides training and education on disability to people with disabilities called 9 KIDS (Keys to Introducing Disability in Society) Project. Teachers and trainers have helped to make classrooms more inclusive by bringing fun toys, games, stories, songs, books, and enthusiasm [16][18].

In the use of disabled characters, clumsiness or foolishness, malice or evil are all labels that are placed upon them in books as blatant and hurtful errors. They should, however, have complex personalities that differentiate them from one another. A typical mood in each of these stories is depressing; the characters are always the recipients of sympathy and are always hoping that they will be able to recover. In order to convey any understanding of the complete person, the writer should be able to show the person's relationships with peers and his/her thoughts unrelated to the disability. The main character are usually shown as handsome, or beautiful, regardless of their disability. The reality is that some of them have attractive partners despite their

disabilities. Does each individual person see themselves as an individual with many similarities and differences, or are they viewed as "just like you"? [16]

The important aspect of the story is to consider whether it might embarrass or hurt a child with a disability in any way. Disabled children must be able to identify with positive roles that they can identify with. It is possible to illustrate such a kind of evaluation by looking at the work of one of the best-known children's book authors today, Eloise Greenfeld. There is a story in this book written by a real-world, unsentimental author in which a young girl with a wheelchair is the lead character.

In the film, Darlene is portrayed as a young girl belonging to a caring family. She enjoys improvised games with uncle when mother is not at home. Her mother was impatiently waiting for Darlene to come back when she first arrived, but after having been with her uncle for so long, she had changed her mind. It was not uncommon for Darlene to react like this in a typical family.

Without being constantly "good-natured" about everything, she can change her mind if she wants, without being pitied for changing her mind.

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