Intervention in School and Clinic

http://isc.sagepub.com

Teaching Students About Learning Disabilities Through Children's Literature

Mary Anne Prater, Tina Taylor Dyches and Marissa Johnstun

Intervention in School and Clinic 2006; 42; 14

DOI: 10.1177/10534512060420010301

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://isc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/42/1/14

Published by:

Hammill Institute on Disabilities

and

http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Intervention in School and Clinic* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://isc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://isc.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Teaching Students About Learning Disabilities Through Children's Literature

Mary Anne Prater, Tina Taylor Dyches, and Marissa Johnstun

Children's literature often portrays characters with disabilities. These books may be used to promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of those with disabilities. We provide guidelines for selecting high-quality literature and ideas for using characterizations of learning disabilities to teach students about themselves and others. Two sample lesson plans and a list of 30 recommended books are included.

Vol. 42, No. 1, September 2006 (pp. 14–24)

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Many authors have written books for children and adolescents portraying characters with disabilities. Educators have advocated the use of this literature for the purposes of

1. teaching about disabilities in general (Blaska & Lynch, 1998; Prater, 2000);
2. teaching other content through thematic units (Prater & Sileo, 2001);
3. implementing bibliotherapy (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000); and
4. promoting awareness, understanding, and acceptance of those with disabilities (Dyches & Prater, 2000).

Although authors have addressed using children's books to teach about (a) individuals with disabilities in general (e.g., Blaska & Lynch, 1998) and (b) those with developmental disabilities (e.g., Dyches & Prater, 2000), we did not locate any material that focused specifically on using children's literature to teach about learning disabilities. Herein we focus on how children's literature that portrays learning disabilities can be used to promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of individuals with learning disabilities.

Most commonly, characters with disabilities portrayed in children's books have physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities. Fewer books have characterized specific learning disabilities. However, a recent and comprehensive analysis located 90 fiction picture and chapter books published during the 20th century that do have such characters (Prater, 2003). We present information and ideas for using children's books that include characters with learning disabilities (LD). Specifically, we discuss

- selecting high-quality literature,
- using these books in the classroom, and
- teaching children and adolescents about those with learning disabilities.

Selecting High-Quality Literature

Most children's literature experts agree that the quality of a particular book is judged by both text and illustrations. The skillful blend of these features allows authors to connect with readers in ways that are exciting and new or that expand readers' personal perspectives. In addition to the quality of the text and illustrations, teachers' purposes for using the books and the portrayal of a specific character should guide the selection process. In the next section we discuss suggested criteria to use in selecting high-quality literature as it relates to the characterization of LD as well as literary and illustrative qualities.

Purpose and Portrayal of Learning Disabilities

When selecting children's literature featuring characters with learning disabilities, teachers must consider the purpose for using the book. Once teachers have determined their objectives, they must consider the portrayal of the character with learning disabilities. Sometimes the portrayal may be even more important to teachers than the quality of text or illustrations. For example, some books may be of high literary quality yet portray individuals with LD inaccurately. Further, some depictions may suggest that individuals with LD should only be educated in segregated environments or that they are limited in their opportunities for choice, education, or vocation.

Conversely, some books portray accepted social and educational values but are poorly written. Other books may be of high-literary quality with positive portrayals of individuals with learning disabilities but in some other way they may fail to meet the teacher's educational purposes. For example, a teacher may select a high-literary quality book with a positive portrayal of learning disabilities, yet the readability may be too difficult for students with learning disabilities in the classroom. In this instance, the teacher would need to implement strategies beyond assigning the book as independent reading, such as preteaching vocabulary, using paired readings, or reading the book aloud to the students. For a list of potential questions related to characterizations of LD as well as how to choose quality text and illustrations, see Table 1.

Literary Features

The literary elements in quality children's literature entail the following:

- theme,
- characterization,
- setting,
- plot,
- point of view, and
- literary style (Dyches & Prater, 2000).

All should be considered when selecting a book to use in the classroom.

Theme. The theme is the main concept of a book, embedded in the story to teach a lesson or persuade the reader to accept an idea or a value (Sawyer, 2000). Themes in children's literature are usually direct and obvious, whereas adolescent literature's themes may be subtle. Complex themes unfold with the telling of the story, and layers of themes add depth and dimension to the plot and characters. In books that portray characters with LD, themes are often central to the reader's ability to relate to the disability (e.g., teasing, accepting differences, forming friendships), whereas other themes are not directly related to the character's learning disability and not emphasized.

Characterization. Quality characterization involves main and supporting characters who are credible, consistent, multidimensional, and ever-growing. Readers can identify with the characters because they appear to be real and

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Table 1. Criteria for Determining Quality Literature

Category	Criteria
Portrayal of LD[a]	• Does the character portray LD realistically? (e.g., not another disability such as mental retardation) • Is the special education process portrayed accurately? (e.g., referral and assessment process) • Is the terminology used accurate? (e.g., dyslexia) • Are examples of others with LD appropriate? (e.g., references to Einstein, Patton, and others as having LD) • How are teachers portrayed? (e.g., the special educator rescues the student with LD from the evil general educator) • Can the book be used to raise awareness, understanding, and acceptance of students with learning disabilities?
Literary quality	• Does the book have quality depictions of settings? • Are cultural aspects, financial conditions, and social setting accurately portrayed? • Does the story emphasize similarities rather than differences between characters with and without learnin disabilities? • Is the complexity of the plot appropriate for the age of the students? • Was the point of view of the story consistent and believable? • Is the language complexity (e.g., vocabulary, syntax) appropriate for the students?
Illustrations	• Do the illustrations add to the overall story? • Are the individual illustrations artistic and stylish? • Is the overall layout of illustrations and text artistic and stylish? • Do the illustrations portray the character with LD appropriately?

Note. LD = learning disabilities.
[a]For more information, see Prater (2003).

are true to their nature and roles in thoughts, words, actions, language, and expressions (Sawyer, 2000). They have many unique attributes, and the characterization does not focus only on one aspect of the character, such as the disability. Quality characterizations portray the depth and breadth of all of the characters, who grow and develop reasonably throughout the story.

Setting. Quality depictions of settings not only describe where and when the characters lived but also include portrayals of cultural aspects, moral and social tone, financial conditions, and ethical challenges (Sawyer, 2000). Descriptive settings enhance the story by allowing readers to feel as if they have entered the story and can navigate their way around the characters' worlds.

Plot. The events that take place in the story form the plot, and for young readers, the plot is usually simple and predictable. To capture the attention of adolescent readers, more complex plots are necessary, presenting a conflict that they can relate to or care about. As readers become emotionally involved in the story, the conflict is more clearly defined, tension is built, and resolution of the conflict is anticipated. In complex children's literature, new twists and false endings may be presented. The resolution of the conflict follows the climax, or highest point in dramatic tension (Sawyer, 2000). It is appropriate for the character with LD to solve problems in the story without relying extensively on adults, thus avoiding a portrayal of learned helplessness or a history of repeated failure.

Point of View. Often children's stories are told from the child's perspective, either through the words and thoughts of the child or through an omniscient voice that views events with a child's values and motivations. Quality literature contains a point of view that is clearly distinguishable, consistent, and believable, particularly concerning the character with LD. The point of view of a character with LD should reflect the individual nature of the character but also accurately reflect the feelings that many individuals with LD may experience, for example, embarrassment, frustration, anxiety, or being singled-out.

Literary Style. The authors' choice of words, sentence structure, figures of speech, and rhythmic patterns are used to develop the plot, characters, and setting. The complexity of the style should be appropriate for the age level of the intended readers, including both narrative language, dialogue, and any text written by the character with LD. It is important that authors accurately depict the voice of the character with LD so the character's disability is not mistaken for another disability (e.g., mental retardation).

Illustrations

Although these literary elements of children's literature are sufficient to represent positive portrayals of individuals with learning disabilities in books written for adolescents, books for young children are incomplete without illustrations. Picture storybooks, which are generally targeted for young readers or nonreaders, tell a story through pictures, either alone or combined with text. Chapter books may contain some illustrations, but the pictures are not essential to telling the story. Quality illustrations, including photography, incorporate story interpretation, appropriate style, text enhancement, artistry, and layout.

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Interpretation. Quality illustrations help the reader interpret the story. Beginning readers should be able to retell the story by "reading" the illustrations. Because LD is considered to be an "invisible disability," it is important that children with LD are not portrayed in illustrations as looking different from their typical peers.

Illustration Styles. The style of the illustrations should be appropriate to the story and age level of the target audience. The style of the art should be appealing to children, whether it be representational, expressionistic, surrealistic, impressionistic, folk, naive, or cartoon.

Text Enhancement. Quality illustrations enhance the plot, theme, setting, and mood of the story by providing richer descriptions than may be captured in simple text. Illustrators put into visual form what the words say or what they merely suggest. Sometimes illustrations are extensions of the text.

Artistry. The characteristics of quality art in illustrations include rhythm, balance, variety, emphasis, spatial order, and unity. The artistic use of color, line, shape, and visual text displays the work as art for the sake of art, not merely to enhance the story. One artistic medium such as crayon or watercolor may be used throughout the book or a combination may be employed.

Layout. The layout of the illustrations and text should be visually appealing, beginning with the cover of the book. Nodelman (1996) described picture books as "short books that tell stories with relatively few words, but with large, usually colorful pictures on every page" (p. 215). The print size, color, and placement should complement the illustrations, and text should be placed where it is easy to read.

Specific Books Portraying Learning Disabilities

Of the 90 books located by Prater (2003) that include characters with learning disabilities, we selected 30 that we recommend based on a combination of the quality of the text, illustrations, and characterization. Generally all of the recommended books portray characteristics of learning disabilities accurately, as well as reflect best practice. A few, however, describe out-of-date practices (e.g., using the *Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Ability* in *Do Bananas Chew Gum?*) or appear to ignore some important aspects of the special education process (e.g., no assessment or Individualized Education Program [IEP] development prior to providing services). Such books may be used as a springboard for thoughtful discussions of the history of the field and what constitutes best practice and legal requirements. Plot summaries of the 30 recommended books appear in Table 2.

Using Books in the Classroom

In addition to access to and selection of high-quality literature that portrays learning disabilities, teachers can use these books in myriad ways. Classrooms are enriched when high-quality literature is incorporated into the curriculum. Such literature "has the ability to explore and explain ideas without being bound by the restraints found in textbooks" (Morrison & Rude, 2002, p. 117). Teachers can skillfully use both picture books and chapter books to serve the curricular and social needs of their students.

Picture Books

When most people think about books for children, they visualize picture books, in which the text is written at a level the young child can understand but cannot yet read. Thus, parents and teachers generally read picture books aloud to young children. Picture books can, however, also be used with older audiences and for students with LD.

High-quality picture books consist of both text of literary quality and illustrations of artistic excellence. Children enjoy discovering how the pictures and the words function together to tell a story (Lukens, 1999). It is an excellent opportunity to help children to learn story structure. When introducing and reading a picture book, and during follow-up discussion, teachers should emphasize elements of both the text and the pictures. High-quality wordless picture books are also an excellent source. In fact, wordless books have been described as "pure" picture books (Hillman, 1999) that can be used to support basic literacy skills, such as handling books appropriately and inventive storytelling (Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, & Zhang, 2002). All children who have not yet developed the literacy skills to read text, such as students with limited English proficiency, students with learning disabilities, or very young students, can benefit from wordless books. Jalongo et al. (2002) suggested, for example, that students be allowed to view the entire book and then produce an accompanying story. The story may be audiotaped and transcribed later. These interpretations of the wordless books may be added to the classroom library and later taken home by the student author.

Once a high-quality picture book has been selected, it should be used strategically to meet the teacher's instructional purposes. A developmentally appropriate introduction to the book can draw students into the story. Teachers can show the students the cover and other illustrations, read the title and author of the book from the title page, and then ask students what they think the book will be about. Students may be challenged to pay attention for something specific when reading the book, such as how they react to the student with LD or how the character felt during the story.

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Table 2. Thirty Recommended Books That Include a Character With Learning Disabilities

Title, author (illustrator), publisher, year	Plot summary
	Early elementary
Candy Corn Contest by Patricia Reilly Giff . (Blanche Sims), Dell, 1984.	For every library book page read, students in Ms. Rooney's class get a chance to guess the number of candy corn pieces in the jar. Richard and Matthew are at a disadvantage because they are poor readers.
Happy Birthday, Jason by C. Jean Cutbill & Diane Rawsthron (Sarah Kronick), IPI, 1984.	Jason's learning disability doesn't get in the way of his having a very happy birthday.
It's George by Miriam Cohen (Lillian Hoban), Greenwillow, 1988.	First-grader George, who has difficulty writing, is featured on the news for calling 911 and saving an elderly man's life.
The Hard Life of Seymour E. Newton by Ann B. Herold (Sherry Neidigh), Herald, 1990.	Third-grader Peter is teased for having learning problems. He gains strength by watching a spider rebuild his web stronger each time it is destroyed.
Thank You, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco (Patricia Polacco), Philomel, 1998.	Trisha, excited to start school and learn to read, finds reading to be very difficult. The teasing and embarrassment are unbearable until her new teacher, Mr. Falker, recognizes her learning problems, and Trisha gets the help she needs.
	Upper elementary
The Best Fight by Anne Schlieper (Mary Beth Schwark), Whitman, 1995.	Jamie gets into a lot of fights when his peers tease him for being unable to read. Finally he's put in detention, where he and the principal have heart-to-heart discussions about his disability.
Claudia's Freind Friend by Ann M. Martin, Scholastic, 1993.	No one understands Claudia's difficulty with her English class except Shea, who has a learning disability. They work together to show themselves and others just how smart they are.
Do Bananas Chew Gum? by Jamie Gilson, Pocket, 1980.	Sam, starting in his fifth school in 7 years, has difficulty hiding his reading and spelling problems, particularly from Alicia, the smartest girl in his class, and a neighborhood lady for whom he babysits after school.
How Many Days Until Tomorrow? by Caroline Janover (Charlotte Janover), Woodbine House, 2000.	Josh and his older brother, Simon, spend an adventuresome summer on an island off the coast of Maine with their grandparents. [Sequel to *Josh, A Boy With Dyslexia*]
Josh, A Boy With Dyslexia by Caroline Janover, Waterfront, 1988.	Josh's anxieties about attending a new school are fulfilled, particularly as his older brother's new friend teases him for attending the special class.
Just Call Me Stupid by Tom Birdseye, Holiday House, 1993.	Fifth-grader Patrick is afraid to try for fear that he'll fail. He's never learned to read until the girl next door, Celina, shows faith in him.
Life Magic by Melrose Cooper, Holt, 1996.	Crystal becomes very close to her Uncle Joe, who has moved in with her family as his health begins to deteriorate from AIDS. Uncle Joe shares with Crystal that he also had difficulty in school.
Man from the Sky by Avi, Morrow, 1980.	Eleven-year-old Jamie, who has difficulty reading, enjoys "reading the sky." One day he notices a parachutist land in a cow pasture nearby. Jamie helps the police locate the parachutist, who happens to be a criminal.
My Name is Brian by Jeanne Betancourt, Scholastic, 1993.	Even though Brian is finally diagnosed with dyslexia during the sixth grade, he continues to have some problems with school and with those he thought were his friends.
Putting Up With Sherwood by Ellen Matthews, Westminster, 1980.	Diane is dismayed when Sherwood, the class "dummy," moves in next door, and their teacher asks Diane to help him with his homework every night.
Sixth Grade Can Really Kill You by Barthe DeClements, Scholastic, 1985.	Helen is a troublemaker at school, generally in frustration because of her reading and spelling difficulties. Her mother tutors her and does not want Helen in special education until her father intervenes and she gets the assistance she needs.
Sixth Grade Sleepover by Eve Bunting, Harcourt/Brace/Jovanovich, 1986.	Janie worries that the Rabbit Reading Club's sleepover will expose her fear of the dark. She learns that night, however, that a newcomer, Rosie, also has a secret—a reading disability.
Will the Real Gertrude Hollings Please Stand Up? by Sheila Greenwald, Little/Brown, 1983.	Gertrude, an 11-year-old girl with a learning disability, spends several weeks with her overachieving cousin, Albert. For the first time, Gertrude is given an opportunity to be the tutor to teach Albert how to be a brother.
Yours Turly, Shirley by Ann M. Martin, Holiday House, 1988.	Shirley, a fourth grader with a learning disability, feels inferior to her gifted older brother and her newly adopted younger Vietnamese sister.

(Table continues)

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

(Table 2 continued)

Title, author (illustrator), publisher, year	**Plot summary**
	Secondary
Adam Zigzag by Barbara Barrie, Delacorte, 1994.	While Adam's parents struggle to find a school to help him academically, Adam turns to drugs to cover up his problems.
And One For All by Theresa Nelson, Orchard, 1989.	The relationships among Geraldine, her older brother Wing, and his friend Sam change when Wing enlists in the Marines and Sam moves away.
Angie by Pat Bezzant, Fawcett Juniper, 1994.	Angie feels insecure about herself until one of the cutest boys in school starts paying attention to her.
The Best Way Out by Louise Albert, Bradbury, 1976.	Everything goes wrong for 13-year-old Haywood when he is bussed across town to attend another school. His friend Leon's school life also changes when he becomes identified for special education services. Haywood is retained in seventh grade and becomes truant until a special teacher shows interest in him.
Dicey's Song by Cynthia Voight, Atheneum, 1982.	Dicey and her siblings (including Maybeth, who has a learning disability) move in with their grandmother because their mother is in a psychiatric institution. Dicey learns to face their mother's death and accept adoption by her grandmother. [Newbery Award]
Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick, Scholastic, 1993.	Max, an eighth grader with a learning disability, befriends Kevin, affectionately referred to as "Freak," whose birth defect has affected his body but not his genius mind. They join forces to create a powerful team.
Kiss the Clown by C. S. Adler, Houghton Mifflin, 1986.	Viki likes Marc but learns he is self-centered and begins to appreciate his brother Joel, who has a learning disability but is fun and social.
Matthew Pinkowski's Special Summer by Patrick J. Quinn, Gallaudet University, 1991.	As summer begins, 13-year-old Matthew and his family move to a new city. He befriends Tommy, a slow learner; Tommy's sister, Sandy; and a girl who is deaf, Laura. They have a very adventuresome summer helping Matthew forget his trouble with reading and writing.
Seventeen Against the Dealer by Cynthia Voight, Atheneum, 1989.	Dicey struggles with starting a boat-building business while facing romantic problems, handling family challenges, and dealing with a drifter who offers to help her. (see Dicey's Song)
Squarehead and Me by Henry Louis Haynes (Len Epstein), Westminister, 1980.	David doesn't want to associate much with "Squarehead." But they end up on a farm for several days together, and David begins to understand Squarehead's problems.
The Worst Speller in Junior High by Caroline Janover, Free Spirit, 1995.	As Katie begins seventh grade she's determined to be popular. She's forced to choose between two boys who like her–one who is smart, sensitive, and rich, but not popular and another who is good looking and popular, but obnoxious.

Teachers can then read the story without interruption so the students are free to make their own interpretations. If possible, the book should be held so that all students can see the pictures. If not, the teacher should stop after every page to show the pictures. A second reading of the story may be punctuated with teacher commentary and attention-directing strategies. Also, a "Question the Author" approach can be used by pausing the reading at predetermined points and posing questions to the class about the story (Sandora, Beck, & McKeown, 1999). Finally, on completion of the reading, teachers should review the book to assess various levels of learning among the students. Suggestions for introducing, presenting, and reviewing picture books are presented in Table 3.

Chapter Books

Teachers can use chapter books with their students in many ways, including read-alouds, independent reading, and paired readings. Read-alouds occur when a group of students listen to the same book being read. Independent reading periods usually allow students to select books to read by themselves; paired readings may involve pairs of students reading the same or different books at the same time. General ideas for using chapter books in the classroom appear in Table 4.

Read Alouds. Chapter books are written so that children who are reading at the level of the book can read them independently. This does not, however, preclude teachers and parents from reading such books aloud. Reading aloud can provide students models in fluent and expressive reading and can expose them to vocabulary and syntax that they cannot yet read. This is particularly important for students whose reading ability does not match their interest level.

Studies have indicated that school-age children who are read to by their teachers are significantly ahead of those who are not given such opportunities in their progress in

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

reading, vocabulary development, and comprehension (Rothlein & Meinbach, 1996). A connection also exists between being read to and writing performance. For example, reading aloud can spark children's imagination, giving them ideas and topics for creative writing (Rothlein & Meinbach, 1996). Teachers need to select a specific time for reading aloud, rather than trying to fit it into an already busy schedule without preplanning. The age and attention span of the students should be considered when determining the length of the read-aloud sessions.

Independent Reading. Reading is a skill that needs to be practiced. Independent reading provides opportunities for applying reading skills that have been taught. Teachers must ensure, however, that selected material is available that matches the independent reading level of each student, then consistently schedule time for independent reading. The following guidelines provide the approximate amount of time to schedule independent reading (Rothlein & Meinbach, 1996):

- Kindergarten through first grade: 5–10 minutes
- Second through third grade: 10–15 minutes
- Fourth through sixth grade:15–20 minutes
- Seventh grade and above: 20–30 minutes

Paired Reading. Teachers using the paired reading strategy may match less-able readers with more-able readers. One approach for paired reading is to have the less-able student read easier text with the partner correcting when needed. Then when the text is difficult to read, the partners read out loud together. This allows the less-able reader to read texts of higher readability level (Rothlein & Meinbach, 1996).

Whether the paired students are the same age or enrolled in the same grade level, teachers must carefully select and match students. In addition, teachers need to outline the procedures of paired reading and train all students involved. The paired reading sessions should be conducted at a regularly scheduled time and monitored carefully. Teachers may wish to alternate silent reading with paired reading.

Teachers can be creative in generating activities for using books that characterize individuals with LD. These activities can be directed toward academic achievement, or they can promote social values such as helping students with and without LD gain insight into the nature and management of the disability.

Table 3. Ideas for Using Picture Books

Sequence	Idea
Introducing the picture book	• Show students the cover and other illustrations. • Read the title and author of the book from the title page. • Ask students what they think the book will be about. • Challenge the students to listen for something specific.
While reading the picture book	• First, read the book without interruption. • If possible, hold the book so all students can see the pictures. If not, stop after every page to show the pictures. • Read the book a second time, stopping periodically to ask questions, such as what has happened, what will happen next, how the character feels, and how the students would feel if they were the character. • Explain any vocabulary or concepts students may not understand. • Point out specific aspects of the illustrations. • Ask students what they see and what the pictures tell that the words do not. • Monitor the pace of reading the story to ensure student attention.
After reading the picture book	• Review with students the sequence of events within the story. • Ask students to retell the story. • Ask students how the story made them feel. • Ask students what they would do in a similar situation.
Teaching about learning disabilities	• Discuss with students what a learning disability means. • Ask students how they would react if a student with a learning disability were in their class. • Ask students how the person in the story is the same or different from them. • Ask students how they think the person with a learning disability in the story felt at various times.

Teaching Students About Learning Disabilities

Many children love reading or having someone read to them. Experiences with books allow readers to look within themselves to understand feelings, relationships, and experiences at a deeper level and also to bond with characters, even though they may be separated by space, time, culture, language, or ability. When readers reflect on similarities between themselves and the characters in the book, they learn to accept characters who may learn differently than they do. Children's literature that portrays characters with LD is one tool that can be used to promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of those with learning disabilities.

Awareness

Children learn at a young age the great diversity within the human race, often through direct experiences with

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Table 4. Ideas for Using Chapter Books

Sequence	Idea
Introducing the chapter book	• Ask students what questions they have after reading the title or the first page. • Preselect a short passage to read to students as a motivator to learn more. • Share an anecdote about the author.
While reading a chapter book	• Have students keep journals in which they answer specific questions or express their general feelings about the book. • Ask students to deliberately visualize characters and settings. • Allow students to discuss reactions to the book in small groups. • Periodically ask questions to enhance interest and comprehension. • Pair students and have them take turns reading a section to one another. • Audio or videotape the book being read so that those who are absent may participate.
After reading a chapter book	• Encourage students to share their impressions, feelings, and opinions about the book. • After reading a book aloud, make certain it is available to students in the classroom or library for those who wish to read the book independently.
Teaching about learning disabilities	• Have students keep a journal as if they were the person with a learning disability. Have them react to the situations in the book. • While reading the book, ask students to compare and contrast the characteristics of the character with what they know about learning disabilities. Use the opportunity to dispel myths and reinforce accurate information. • Visit the following Web site to see what it feels like to have a specific learning disability. Ask students to compare their experiences with the character in the book. **http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/misunderstoodminds/reading.html**

people who look different from themselves. However, some children's experiences with diverse groups of people are limited. Children's literature can be used to provide readers with an awareness of diversity, particularly the diversity caused by various disabilities. For example, elementary children can learn how specific learning disabilities affect learning subjects such as reading and math, whereas secondary students might learn about the potential lifelong affects of having a learning disability.

Beyond reading about the general nature and characteristics of learning disabilities, readers should become aware of the individuality of each child. Although some children's books may portray characters with LD stereotypically, others show depth of characterization by focusing not only on the disability but also on the strengths, interests, and motivations of the character. This allows readers to be aware of similarities and differences they may have with children who have learning disabilities.

Awareness of social issues also may be generated through children's books. At a basic level, students may become aware of inclusion, bullying, and higher educational opportunities for those with LD. More complex issues may include awareness of legislation and litigation affecting these individuals' lives.

Understanding

Whereas "awareness" suggests a superficial level of knowledge about a person or issue, "understanding" suggests a deeper level of intellectual and personal involvement. After reading a well-written book, readers should have a better understanding of themselves, of others, and of social issues.

Reading books that portray individuals with LD may help readers understand their own feelings and reactions toward these individuals. Storylines that portray the difficulties characters with LD experience in school can provide rich discussions in which readers ask themselves, "Have I ever made fun of kids who need extra help in school?" or "How can I stand up for kids with learning disabilities when they are being teased?" When given opportunities to vicariously live the experiences of the character with a learning disability, readers get a glimpse of what it might be like for someone with this kind of disability to struggle in school, make and keep friends, and set and achieve academic goals.

Awareness should lead to a greater understanding of social issues if students inquire about social issues involving individuals with LD, conduct related research, and report their findings. Issues to be explored could include

- cultural differences in identifying individuals with LD,
- continuum of services and placement for students with LD,
- government funding of special education, and
- challenges and achievements of famous individuals with LD.

Figure 1 contains a sample lesson plan that may be used to promote awareness of similarities and differences between a character with a learning disability and a student without a disability using the book *Do Bananas Chew Gum?* (Gilson, 1980). Similar activities could be used with other books.

Acceptance

The next level of introspection—acceptance of those who are different and acceptance of one's own feelings and attitudes—requires a form of emotional involvement. It is

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Book: ***Do Bananas Chew Gum?*** by Jamie Gilson, Pocket, 1980.

Global Purpose: To teach that all people have (a) strengths, limitations, likes, dislikes, and (b) different and common attributes with others.

Objective: After reading the book and discussing it in class, students will (a) list strengths/likes and limitations/dislikes of Sam and themselves and (b) describe commonalities and differences with Sam and themselves in a written passage.

Materials: Book, worksheets, pencils, writing paper

Introduce the book

- Read the title and author.
- Ask students why they think the author used this title.
- Read a selection from page 131 when Sam is being tested.
- Ask students why they think the teacher is asking him these questions. Emphasize that the question can be answered only by reading the book.

While reading

- Tell students that after every chapter the class is going to list what is easy and difficult for Sam and also list his likes and dislikes. Ask them to listen for these characteristics as you read the book aloud.
- After each chapter, write student-generated lists on chalkboard.

After reading

- Ask students to list 5 items in each of the following categories: Sam's strengths, limitations, likes, and dislikes; and my strengths, limitations, likes, and dislikes. Then ask the students to identify commonalities and differences between themselves and Sam and write a paragraph describing each.
- Ask students to read their paragraphs in class. Discuss additional commonalities and differences among students in the group.

Closing

- Review that everyone has differences and commonalities with other people. Mention a few specifics that the students included.

Figure 1. Lesson plan #1: Teaching awareness and understanding of disabilities.

quite possible that many people can be aware of human diversity and can understand the nature of specific disabilities yet never come fully to accept those who are different from themselves in one way or another. A powerful book may be the impetus that transforms readers' lives as they learn to accept their own inadequacies, feelings, and reactions to others. Readers can learn to accept their relationships with individuals with LD—as sibling, peer, child, co-worker, or future parent.

Figure 2 provides an example of an activity that can be used to promote acceptance toward others' feelings and acceptance of those who are different. This activity uses the book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998) as the central point; however, similar activities can be used with other books.

Cautions

Prior to using children's literature that depicts characters with LD, teachers should take several precautions. First, a common assumption is that many famous individuals, such as Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, and Hans Christian Anderson, had learning disabilities (Adelman & Adelman, 1987). Authors of children's books often mention these famous individuals with the intention of helping the character with LD feel he or she is capable of making great achievements as well. The posthumous diagnosis of famous individuals as having learning disabilities, however, has been disputed (Adelman & Adelman, 1987).

Second, teachers need to read books before reading or recommending them to students. Teachers should look for current and appropriate characterizations in terms of label (e.g., learning disability vs. minimal brain dysfunction), instructional strategies (e.g., direct teaching of skills vs. ability or process training), and school placement (e.g., general education classroom vs. segregated school), among others. Books that portray less current and appropriate practices may be used— within the context of historic or nonexamples, providing the springboard for discussing current and more appropriate practice.

Lists of books addressing characters with LD are readily available in print (e.g., Hildreth & Candler, 1992; Hulen, Hoffbauer, & Prenn, 1998; Robertson, 1992; Winsor, 1998) and on the Internet (e.g., www.ldonline.org/

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Book: ***Thank You, Mr. Falker*** by Patricia Polacco, Philomel, 1998.

Global Purpose: To increase students' awareness of and sensitivity to others' feelings.

Objective: After hearing the story read, students will draw pictures representing the feelings of Trisha at various stages of the story.

Materials: Copy of the book, worksheets, crayons

Introduce the book	• Ask the students if they like honey and why. Ask if they like books and why. • State: "Today we are going to read a story about a child named Trisha who learns to love books and reading as much as she loves honey." • Show title page and read the title and author. • Ask the students who they think Mr. Falker is and why someone wants to thank him.
While reading	• Stop periodically to highlight the pictures and ask questions. • Ask students how the little girl felt when she was having trouble reading, when Mr. Falker loved her drawings, when Eric and the other children teased her, and when Mr. Falker helped her learn to read.
After reading	• Tell the students that they are going to draw pictures of how Trisha felt at different times in the stories. • Pass out paper and crayons. Have students fold their paper in 4 even boxes. • Retell the story rereading a few preselected passages. • Stop at the following points and ask students to draw a picture of how Trisha felt. Box 1: Trisha had trouble reading; Box 2: Mr. Falker loved Trisha's drawings; Box 3: Eric and the other children teased Trisha; Box 4: Mr. Falker helped Trisha learn to read. • Ask students to imagine themselves as students in Trisha's class and on the back of their paper to draw a picture of how they would show they were her friend.
Closing	• Ask the students how they would feel if they were the little girl in the story and to share some times when they felt happy and when they felt sad. • Ask students to share a time when they helped someone who was being teased or how someone else helped them when they were being teased.

Figure 2. Sample Lesson Plan #2: Teaching acceptance of those with disabilities.

kidzone/read-up.html). As a third caution, teachers should not assume that every booklist, particularly those appearing on the Internet, will be accurate. Prater (2003), in her analysis of characterizations of LD in juvenile literature, eliminated more than 10% of the books appearing on LD booklists because the character did not clearly demonstrate LD but rather another disability, illiteracy, or minor academic problems with no indication of a disability. Internet booklists were more inaccurate than those in print.

Summary

Children's books that portray characters with disabilities are available in most community and school libraries. Teachers are encouraged to use these books, particularly those that portray individuals with LD, in their classroom instruction.. Teachers are particularly encouraged to integrate quality literature in promoting awareness, understanding, and acceptance of individuals with learning disabilities.

About the Authors

Mary Anne Prater, PhD, is a professor and the chair of the Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education at Brigham Young University. Her current interests include disability portrayals in children's literature, instructional strategies for students with mild disabilities, teacher education, and cultural diversity in special education. **Tina Taylor Dyches**, EdD, is an associate professor of special education at Brigham Young University. Her current interests include family adaptation to disability, sibling issues, and developmental disabilities in children's literature. **Marissa Johnstun**, BS, is an education specialist student at Brigham Young University. Her current interests include students with disabilities, eating disorders, and educational psychology. Address: Mary Anne Prater, 340 MCKB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; e-mail: prater@byu.edu

References

Adelman, K. A., & Adelman, H. S. (1987). Rodin, Patton, Edison, Wilson, Einstein: Were they really learning disabled? *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *20*, 270–279.

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008

Blaska, J. K., & Lynch, E. C. (1998). Is everyone included: Using children's literature to facilitate the understanding of disabilities. *Young Children*, *53*(2), 36–39.
Dyches, T. T., & Prater, M. A. (2000). *Developmental disability in children's literature: Issues and annotated bibliography*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.
Gilson, J. (1980). *Do bananas chew gum?* New York: Pocket.
Hildreth, B. L., & Candler, A. (1992). Learning about learning disabilities through general public literature. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *27*, 293–298.
Hillman, J. (1999). *Discovering children's literature*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
Hulen, L., Hoffbauer, D., & Prenn, M. (1998). Children's literature dealing with disabilities: A bibliography for the inclusive classroom. *Journal of Children's Literature*, *24*, 67–72.
Jalongo, M. R., Dragich, D., Conrad, N. K., & Zhang, A. (2002). Using wordless picture books to support emergent literacy. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *29*, 167–177.
Lukens, R. J. (1999). *A critical handbook of children's literature* (6th ed.). New York: Addison-Wesley.
Morrison, W. F., & Rude, H. A. (2002). Beyond textbooks: A rationale for a more inclusive use of literature in preservice special education teacher programs. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *25*, 114–123.
Nodelman, P. (1996). *The pleasures of children's literature* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
Polacco, P. (1998). *Thank you, Mr. Falker.* New York: Philomel.
Prater, M. A. (2000). Using juvenile literature with portrayals of disabilities in your classroom. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *35*, 167–176.
Prater, M. A. (2003). Learning disabilities in children's and adolescent literature: How are characters portrayed? *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *26*, 47–62.
Prater, M. A., & Sileo, N. M. (2001). Using juvenile literature about HIV/AIDS: Ideas and precautions for the classroom. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *33*(6), 34–45.
Robertson, D. (1992). *Portraying persons with disabilities*. New Providence, NJ: Bowker.
Rothlein, L., & Meinbach, A. M. (1996). *Legacies: Using children's literature in the classroom*. New York: HarperCollins.
Sandora, C., Beck, I., & McKeown, M. (1999). A comparison of two discussion strategies on students' comprehension and interpretation of complex literature. *Journal of Reading Psychology*, *20*, 177–212.
Sawyer, W. (2000). *Growing up with literature* (3rd ed.). Albany, NY: Delmar.
Sridhar, D., & Vaughn, S. (2000). Bibliotherapy for all: Enhancing reading comprehension, self-concept, and behavior. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *33*(2), 74–82.
Winsor, P. J. T. (1998). Talking-point: Books about children with learning disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *30*(3), 34–35.

Downloaded from http://isc.sagepub.com by Sandra Hopps on October 15, 2008