

Representation of Disability Awareness in Children’s Literature : a Review of Current 4th
Grade Scholastic Practice

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15 December 2022

Abstract

Disability awareness in children’s literature is crucial for inclusion in education and representation of varying abilities. This mixed methods research examined grade 4 books released from Scholastic from January 2020 through December 2022. Research found that out of 2,002 books total, there were only 8 books with disability awareness, with only one author having a disability themselves.

Introduction

A research study was conducted in 1991 by Emiliano C. Ayala who looked closely at the “poor little thing” phenomenon. Ayala looked at a sample of 59 children’s books that portrayed characters with a disability. The books lacked cultural representation and did not offer an option in any other languages besides English. Their study goes deep into the percentages of books with topics like books with single parent homes, ethnic diversity, types of disabilities represented, and assigned roles. After reading this article I noticed that this problem was still relevant today. So, I took a sample of 4th grade Scholastic book flyers from 2020-2022 to research the

Research Methods

I collected quantitative data from the Scholastic book flyers published from January 2020 through December 2022. I collected this data to prove the low publication rate of books with disability awareness or authors with disabilities. I found that over the course of two years

and over 24 flyers, only 0.0039% of books Scholastic published had disability awareness or authors with disabilities.

I also conducted a semi-structured interview with a local librarian to find more information about how the Scholastic book fair is set up and what books are provided for the book fair. I found that the librarian was “disturbed” with the selection of books she was given and wanted to see more disability representation as well as ethnic representation as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I found that Scholastic has very little to no disability representation and rarely published authors with disabilities. I have created a list of recommendations for Scholastic to have more disability awareness in their flyers.

- Showcase more authors with disabilities on Scholastic flyers.
- Put books with disability awareness on display at Scholastic book fairs.
- Publish at least 10% of the total books published on each flier to have a disability present.
- Have an ethnically diverse representation in the characters.

Research Forum Questions

What are some aspects of education you are interested in studying and why?

- I am interested in studying how the representation of disability in children's literature helps students with exposure to visible and non visible disabilities. Being able to see your own reflection in a book is something a lot of people take for granted. Having books with characters with autism, down syndrome, cerebral palsy, etc not only helps people with those disabilities feel represented but it helps expose the general population to those disabilities.

What is one problem or issue you have experienced related to this topic?

- At first when I was doing research I couldn't figure out how I would collect data on such a broad topic like children's literature. Would I select a certain sample size? Follow what a researcher did before me? Then a classmate gave me the great idea to focus on the Scholastic book flyers so the data would be fixed. As for the topic of disability awareness itself, there is a problem with little to no representation in the Scholastic flyers as well as no authors with disabilities being published.

Given the problem, identify the topic, problem, purpose and develop one question you believe is important to answer?

- The topic is Disability awareness in children's literature.

- Problem: lack of representation
- Question: How much disability awareness is represented in scholastic book flyers.

Identify and narrow your topic to a few key terms using one or two words or short phrases?

- Disability awareness in 4th grade Scholastic flyers
- Disability representation in children's literature
- Representation

Given your topic selection, why is it a topic worthy of study?

- Representation matters. Being exposed to different cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds, and disabilities helps make us better rounded people. Also, being able to see ourselves represented is important to our self image. I want to study this topic to show the lack of representation of disabilities in children's literature, specifically in Scholastic and how more representation would be beneficial.

Given your topic selection, what data or information you will need to collect to answer the questions you have about your topic of study?

- I will need to collect data from all the scholastic flyers from January 2020-December 2022 to find the percentage of books with disability awareness or authors with disabilities.

What types of reliability and validity are you concerned about given your topic of interest?

- Scholastic flyers are inconsistent with the amount of books published on each flier but even more inconsistent with the amount of books with disability released. There were three or less books with disability published each year from Scholastic. I want to change how reliable we can make the books released and to be those with disabilities present and to validate the authors who wrote them. The majority of books published about disabilities aren't written by someone who has a disability themselves. This causes books to be published that are stereotyped or biased.

What "Qualitative" activity could you add to your research, given your topic of interest, which will add depth to the study?

- I did a semi-structured interview with a local librarian during the Scholastic book fair. By doing this I got to see the "behind-the-scenes" of what it's like to set up the book fair, see what books are offered, and to be able to see the librarian's point of view about the books released by Scholastic

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Considering all the possible types of data reviewed and discussed (observation, documents, survey, interview, and focus groups), identify the method of data collection you will use in your proposed study, and evaluate the appropriateness of the data related to the problem and purpose of the study?

- I collected quantitative data of all the scholastic books released during 2020-2022 and calculated the percentages of books with disability awareness within each year.
- I also had a qualitative interview with a local librarian which helped me get the point of view of someone who works closely with Scholastic and I got to see their opinion on the topic.

Considering you as the researcher are the instrument and the tool by which data are gathered, identify those (your) areas of potential bias that could impact your study and its findings?

- Considering I am just collecting data, the only part that could be up for debate is what is considered a disability. But, I have identified that I was counting visible and not visible disabilities in my research. There is no bias present when collecting data. However, the interview I could have presented with a bias on accident since I am so passionate about this topic.

Considering the types of research designs we discussed, identify which design might be most useful related to the problem and purpose of your study?

- After reading through the five different types of research designs, I think mine fits in the research design best. I have both quantitative data from collecting the number of books from Scholastic as well as a semi-structured interview for the qualitative data. This type of design allows me to use two different types of study and use them as a mixed methods research.