

Evaluating and Using Literature Including People with Disabilities in All Classrooms

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Abstract

To help students see their worlds differently and to expand those views beyond their own backyards, educators can expose them to quality multicultural children's literature. In this article, we focus on a subtopic within the genre of multicultural children's literature: literature including people with disabilities. We chose seven recent texts that fall under this category to evaluate. To evaluate multicultural literature including people with disabilities, Ramsey's (2010) reader criteria were used. Finally, we share three distinct techniques with suggestions for incorporating these texts: reciprocal teaching, literature circles, and critical literacy strategies. These practices can help teachers use the previously reviewed texts effectively in their classrooms.

Evaluating and Using Literature Including People with Disabilities in All Classrooms

For many years, minority groups within the United States were ignored in children's literature. If they did appear in books, their characters were stereotypical, ridiculed, and/or seen as secondary to the main characters (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008; Sims Bishop, 2007).

Multicultural literature has no one definition; it can refer to any book about a group of people and their group or individual experience or literature about groups within America who have been overlooked and often ignored by the dominant culture. Temple, Martinez, Yokota and Naylor (2002) wrote that multicultural literature is literature that reflects the multitude of cultural groups within the United States, including but not limited to: religious minorities (such as Amish and Jews); people who live in specific regions of the United States (such as Appalachia); diverse lifestyles (such as families headed by same-sex parents or people with disabilities); and people outside the United States (International Literature). Thus, it is important for educators to include as many different cultures in the literature used in the classroom, because, as Gay (2002) stated, "Teachers' knowledge about and attitudes toward cultural diversity are powerful determinants of learning opportunities and outcomes..." for all students. One form of diversity that has been neglected in children's literature in the past is that of people with disabilities (Blaska, 1996). Multicultural literature should include diverse people with disabilities (Gay, 2002; Liebowitz, 2013).

To help students see their worlds differently and to expand those views beyond their own backyards, educators can expose them to quality multicultural children's literature, including literature appropriately including people with disabilities. Doing this helps accomplish the goals of multicultural education. From looking at literature, educators and children can move to looking at situations in the real world and gain benefits such as:

- Seeing a wider view of their world
- Learning to appreciate other cultures and our differences

- Discovering commonalities within all cultures
- Discussing preconceptions and prejudices often overlooked in a classroom
- Seeing themselves in literature and make connections between what they read and their own lives and experiences
- Increasing respect for all individuals, improves self-efficacy and helps students recognize the contributions of minorities (Landt 2006)

This article will explore the importance of including people with disabilities in children's literature. It will also discuss why it is important that educators know how to evaluate literature that has characters with disabilities as well as provide suggestions for how teachers can do this. Finally, ideas for how teachers can integrate literature with characters with disabilities into the classroom will be discussed.

Literature Including People with Disabilities

In this article, we focus on a subtopic within the genre of multicultural children's literature: literature including people with disabilities. For the most part, characters with disabilities in children's literature have physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities (Prater, Dyches, & Johnstun, 2006). Blaska (1996) wrote that:

Perhaps no group has been as overlooked and inaccurately presented in children's books as individuals with disabilities. Most often they were not included in stories and when they were, many negative stereotypes prevailed such as characters who were pitiful or pathetic, evil or superheroes, or a burden and incapable of fully participating in everyday life. Often the difference or disability was the main personality trait emphasized to the reader; not a balance of strengths and weaknesses (p. 11).

The implementation of The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act in 1975 (the precursor of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004) brought about important changes in the field of literature including people with disabilities. More children with disabilities began attending neighborhood schools, and therefore were in contact with more teachers, students, librarians, readers, and authors. This had a positive influence on literature with the introduction of including more developed characters with disabilities and conditions that were more carefully described (Salem, 2006).

A challenge for teachers can be finding quality literature within this subtopic and then using it effectively in the classroom. For the purposes of this article, we will describe evaluation techniques used with current titles under the topic of literature including people with disabilities, examples from these texts for educators, and then provide some suggestions for the integration of these texts into curricula. The authors chose seven recent texts that fall under the category of literature including people with disabilities to evaluate: *Rules* by Cynthia Lord (2006); *Five Flavors of Dumb* by Antony John (2011); *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper (2010); *Somebody Please Tell Me Who I Am* by Harry Mazer and Peter Lerangis (2012); *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine (2010); *Crooked Kind of Perfect* by Linda Urban (2009); and *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio (2012). These texts are classified as middle grades and young adult literature and could be used in upper elementary grades (4th/5th) through high school. Additionally, these texts were chosen

because of their inclusion of various award lists (e.g., Schneider Family Book Award and Notable Books for a Global Society). Incorporating literature with strong characters with disabilities and utilizing this literature to educate students about inclusive education and communities can assist in expanding the perspectives of both educators and students. Such literature can be utilized to teach educational standards related to theme, character, perspective taking, critical inquiry, audience, voice, and many other skills.

Evaluation of Books

It is important for educators to know how to accurately evaluate children's literature for multicultural components. This is because, as Dyches, Prater, and Leininger (2009) stated: "Even though tens of thousands of juvenile books are published annually, not all of them are considered of high quality" (p. 304). Teachers especially need to know how to evaluate literature including people with disabilities, as there is a high risk of negative bias and ideas about people with disabilities being adopted by children if they are regularly exposed to poorly written literature:

If young children are repeatedly exposed to biased representations through words and pictures, there is a danger that such distortions will become a part of their thinking, especially if reinforced by societal biases (Anti-Defamation League, 2003, p. 1).

Educators are typically familiar with typical components of literature that they need to carefully evaluate, such as story, characters, illustrations, settings, and themes (Anti-Defamation League, 2003; Dyches et al., 2009). However, to accurately evaluate literature about people with disabilities, educators need to have further skills to spot stereotypes, biases, prejudice, and other messages that could be communicated.

To evaluate multicultural literature including people with disabilities, the authors suggest utilizing Ramsey's (2010) reader criteria. These criteria include:

- Authentic representations of the culture
- Balanced between modern and historic views
- Accurate details in both text and illustrations
- Promote positive minority characters
- Adequate representation of culture

Using these criteria, the books were reviewed from two specific perspectives: a higher educator with a background in special education mainly focused on more significant disabilities, and a higher educator with a background in reading, including reading disabilities. Although neither reviewer could be considered an insider of this specific culture (people with disabilities), both have had many years of experience in the classroom with students who have disabilities and have worked to prepare teacher candidates for roles in special education and as reading specialists. As educators the authors believe that utilizing their own educator perspective could be beneficial for other teachers, many of whom will also not be cultural insiders. The sections that follow highlight specific examples of the criterion.

Specific Examples from Literature

Authentic representations of the culture.

Out of My Mind provided authentic representation especially in regards to the culture of those with disabilities. Readers are able to get inside the mind of Melody, the main character who has cerebral palsy. They are privy to Melody's own thoughts and feelings about her disability, her family, her school, and her life, whereas the other characters in the book are, for the most part, excluded. Additionally, a broader understanding of educational situations within the culture of those with disabilities is portrayed. Different types of special educators were introduced and described in working with Melody. The book provided very specific and vivid examples of special educators who left Melody and the other students with disabilities in a restrictive environment all day, bored and being taught non-age appropriate concepts. Then another special educator is introduced, as well as the concept of the students with disabilities joining their age-appropriate peers in a less-restrictive environment. With the help of Melody's own thoughts and opinions, the readers can make value judgments on which educators are "bad" versus "good."

Balanced between modern and historic views.

Authors may find it difficult to accurately balance between modern and historic views when writing about people with disabilities; "disability is marginal as a concept within Multicultural Children's Literature and this negatively affects the perception and use of disability as a crucial component in the United States educational and sociocultural landscape" (Causarano, 2012, p.1). This may be because much of the historical views of those with disabilities were often negative, lacking accuracy, derogatory, and discriminatory. Thus, balancing between those historical views and the ever-expanding modern views is a significant task for those writing fiction that includes characters with disabilities (Dyches, et al., 2009). Modern views continue to be impacted by negative views; thus authors need to avoid such negativity and display well researched and experienced writing related to the varied populations of those with disabilities (Curwood, 2013; Dyches, et al., 2009; Prater, et al., 2006). For example, prior to 1996 when the passing of the Traumatic Brain Injury Act occurred, much less research and understanding was available about the effects of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), especially with veterans (Defense Centers of Excellence & Guthrie, 2011). Mazer and Lerangis, the authors of *Somebody Please Tell Me Who I Am*, describe accurate examples of TBI, especially for veterans. By doing this, the authors were able to subtly counteract the historical lack of understanding of TBI via the descriptions of improved and current treatments, therapies, and the main character's experiences with having a TBI via a stream of consciousness voice within the book.

Accurate details in both text and illustrations.

It is apparent when reading *Five Flavors of Dumb*, *A Crooked Kind of Perfect*, and *Wonder* that the authors conducted a great amount of research to provide accurate details of the disabilities and cultures represented within the books. The author of *Five Flavors* went so far as to consult people who knew about Deaf Culture, and people who are deaf to ensure the details were accurate. Mental illness and its effects on family, most especially on children, were very truthfully detailed in *Crooked*. While the author never defines the mental illness of the main character, (Zoe's father), the reader can sympathize (and perhaps empathize) with Zoe's struggle to be typical. Finally, much research had been completed for *Wonder* in the areas of genetics

(including physical and facial deformities) and the significant cultural components that would affect families and those with physical disabilities similar to the character in the book.

Promote positive minority characters.

Within the subtopic of literature including people with disabilities, we consider minority characters to be those with disabilities. It is important to note that within the greater culture of disability, promoting positive characters who have disabilities has to be done very carefully (Anti-Defamation League, 2003; Dyches et al., 2009). For example, in the past typically those with disabilities were characterized as either pitiful, pathetic, victims, victimizers, or magnanimously heroic (Hollander, 2004). Such characters were not written as typical human beings who were allowed to have a range of emotions, make choices (good or bad) for themselves, and/or exemplified in some way as beyond typical (Hollander, 2004) Even in current literature, authors have to be careful to not portray the character with a disability as too remarkable (super-crip), or too pathetic (Hardin & Hardin, 2004). Authors have to write each character displaying how his/her life and family's lives are a different kind of "typical," rather than someone who is abnormal trying to become "normal" (Curwood, 2013; Dyches, et al., 2009; Hollander, 2004; Prater, et al., 2006). Meeting the current criterion means the authors have to find a specific kind of balance within the literature. *Rules* was written in such a way. The characters in the book with different disabilities are presented as two young men who just happen to each have a disability. Catherine, the sister who is the book's main voice, and both young men are allowed a full range of emotions. Additionally, she is able to explore mixed responses to many different experiences related to disabilities and other adolescent social circumstances.

Adequate representation of culture.

Mockingbird provides adequate representation of different components of adolescent culture, especially when that culture is affected by tragedy. The book displays that, truly, all families can be considered multicultural when dealing with death and grief, as the family micro-culture impacts the greater community macro-culture (Pentaris, n.d.). *Mockingbird* also displays how disability impacts all cultures and areas of diversity including race, ethnicity, socio-economic statuses, types of families, and genders. By utilizing the voice and thoughts of Caitlin, who has Asperger's, *Mockingbird* represents and explores a family culture as it deals with grief and disability. The book also broadens this exploration as it displays how the family and Caitlin interact with the community as a whole.

Books can provide students with a chance to "go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about another culture" (Short, Evans, & Hildebrand, 2011, p. 34). In *Five Flavors of Dumb*, the author does this by helping us understand Piper's membership in the Deaf and hearing cultures. Her abilities are seen as assets: lip reading allows her access to private conversations, and, as a shrewd manager, she uses sign language to obscure her intentions from a crooked promoter. Furthermore, this glimpse into her life shows the many ways Piper communicates to her family members, friends, and teachers (e.g., American Sign Language, speaking, Instant Messaging on the computer, and texting).

What could you learn?

Educators can learn and teach a significant amount about the culture of those with disabilities by integrating well written texts with characters with disabilities. Educators can assist students in interpreting the information they receive while reading these texts to gain educated perspectives on disability and how people could misinterpret the information they receive about people with disabilities because of bias and stereotypes (Prater, et al., 2006). Because authors are displaying more interest in expanded, in-depth characters with disabilities, teachers can assist students in exploring characters’ more fully represented personalities, interests, and the multicultural effects of disability on families, communities, friends, schools, and overall culture. Some positive trends in more current children’s literature reviewed include the following increased use of:

- Very appropriate Person-First Language
- Varied perspectives on controversial issues
- Inclusive classroom settings
- Increased exploration of stigma, systematic exclusion and discrimination
- Decrease of “super-crip” portrayal of those with disabilities—instead people with disabilities have real lives, with real feelings, who are mixed in variety
- Advocacy exploration
- Including of the varied use of Augmentative Communication (AAC)

See Table 1 for specific examples of what can be learned for different reader populations.

Table 1

Book title	What could students learn?	What could parents learn?	What could educators learn?
<i>Rules</i>	<p>--about more than onetype of disability</p> <p>--what it’s like to be the sibling of someone with a disability</p> <p>--augmentative communication with pictures</p>	<p>--good examples of stigmatizing treatment, and non-stigmatizing treatment of people with disabilities</p>	<p>--recognizing needs of whole family</p>
<i>5 Flavors of Dumb</i>	<p>--some basic information about Deaf culture and the issues (controversial and not) that individuals with hearing impairments deal with daily</p>	<p>--interesting perspectives from parents of deaf children and children who are hard of hearing</p>	<p>--how school personnel can be supportive (and not be supportive) to those with sensory losses</p> <p>--The stigma that is assumed about those who</p>

	<p>--that interest of music does not have to be limited because of hearing ability</p> <p>--that people with sensory losses are capable and unique individuals</p> <p>**A lot about rock music</p>		<p>are Deaf or hard of hearing</p>
<i>Out of My Mind</i>	<p>--that all people with disabilities (and kids) are smart</p> <p>--about augmentative communication devices and how assistive technology can help them be friends with those with disabilities</p> <p>--how to, and how not to treat someone with a more significant disability</p> <p>--that we are all people, we all have feelings, and all deserve a chance</p>	<p>--how to assist their child to communicate if their child has a more significant disability (how to recognize their attempts to communicate, and advocate for their need for communication devices)</p> <p>--creating a circle of support</p> <p>--how to advocate at the schools</p> <p>--to see the potential of their child</p> <p>--to set a better example of how adults should treat those with disabilities.</p>	<p>--what examples NOT to be like</p> <p>--GREAT example of a good school paraeducator and teacher in this book (as well as lots of NOT great examples)</p> <p>--how to learn from your students—and be taught by them (i.e. the general education social studies teacher)</p> <p>--how to appropriately provide for inclusive settings, Universal Design for learning, and accessibility to physical environments, learning environments, and social environments for those with disabilities.</p> <p>--to see potential in all students.</p>
<i>Somebody, Please Tell Me Who I Am</i>	<p>--about TBI, how they can occur, what the symptoms can be, what therapy and recovery is like</p>	<p>--about TBI, how they can occur, what the symptoms can be, what therapy and recovery is like</p>	<p>--ideas on how to work with those who have experienced TBI, including supporting students with relationships with those</p>

	<p>--how relationships can be affected because of traumatic brain injuries</p> <p>--how just because someone may not be able to communicate verbally, they are still capable of intelligent thoughts, desires, memories, and so forth</p> <p>--life for veterans</p>	<p>--how relationships can be affected because of traumatic injuries</p> <p>--life for veterans</p>	<p>who have experienced TBI</p>
<i>Mockingbird</i>	<p>-- good book for kids dealing with tough crisis situations</p> <p>-- sibling relations and grief/loss</p> <p>--how to treat/and not treat those with disabilities (bullying)</p> <p>--teaches about sensory input—when there is too much, what might occur—and perhaps what to do.</p>	<p>--explores parental grief as well</p>	<p>--school crisis—gives some good examples of school assistance, and some not so great examples of school assistance.</p>
<i>Crooked Kind of Perfect</i>	<p>--parent/child relationships—especially those where the parent has a mental health problem.</p> <p>--friendship, lack of friendship, etc.</p> <p>--delves into early teenage and adult life situations</p>	<p>--provides perspective from both parents (busy working parent, parent with mental health problem)</p> <p>--provides child perspective</p>	<p>--friendship issues/bullies/teenage angst</p> <p>--parental mental health issues</p> <p>--displays (interestingly) that anyone can find/have a job—but that the job needs to fit them and their needs.</p>
<i>Wonder</i>	<p>--names of facial deformities</p>	<p>--the difference between a physical difference and some other disabilities</p>	<p>--the difference between a physical difference and some other disabilities</p>

	--some information about the complexity of genetics --how to include others who have physical differences --how adults can be helpful in inclusion, and not helpful -- students do not need to be prompted by adults to fully include those with disabilities	--how adults can cause problems with children who may be more capable in inclusion than the adults --variety of multicultural families, function, dysfunction, and caring	--variety of multicultural families, function, dysfunction, and caring, and that paying attention to the needs of children means learning about them and their families (instead of judging the students by how they appear)
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What’s missing?

Part of evaluating texts is discovering what the writing includes, as well as what components of multicultural understanding may be missing (Anti-Defamation League, 2003; Dyches et al., 2009). While no book can cover all components of a character, there are some trends that we observed within the seven books reviewed of missing perspectives or cultural components. Some of what we found to be missing included:

- Fathers’ reactions (e.g., while *Out of My Mind* and *Rules* touched on fathers, neither fully developed their perspectives)
- Severe disabilities
- Stories with multiple disabilities (exceptions: *Rules*, *Out of My Mind*)
- Varied forms of Assistive Technology
- Characters with autism who are non-verbal
- Students who have mental illness themselves (rather than a parent or sibling having one)
- Unhappy endings (*Out of My Mind* is the only book that ends in very realistic and unorganized way, which could leave readers questioning how the main character was treated, why the story ended the way it did, and perhaps give them a better opportunity to critically analyze and learn from the book.)

Teaching with Literature Including People with Disabilities

Educators often focus on literature in areas of diversity such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and religion; however disability is not always as easily identified as a component of multicultural literature to be included regularly in classrooms. The Banks’ Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education (1998) argues that gaining different perspectives via knowledge construction, reducing prejudice toward all whom attend school, and empowering school culture and social structure should include all learners. Although much literature in the past has included characters with disabilities, educators may not have focused on these characters as part of the educational experiences students had with literature. As mentioned previously, incorporating literature with strong characters with disabilities, and utilizing this literature to educate students

about inclusive education and communities, can assist in expanding both educators' and students' perspectives. Such literature can be utilized to teach educational standards related to theme, character, perspective taking, critical inquiry, audience, voice, and many other skills. These standards, skills, and incorporation of the Banks' model (1998) can be taught via many teaching methods and techniques. In this article we share three distinct techniques with suggestions for incorporating these texts: reciprocal teaching, literature circles, and critical literacy strategies. These practices can help teachers use the previously reviewed texts effectively in their classrooms.

Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal teaching at its very basic level "is an instructional method designed to help teach reading comprehension skills to students...During initial instructional sessions, the teacher introduces four comprehension strategies: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting" (US Department of Education & Institution of Education Sciences, 2013, p. 1). Teachers build these four comprehension strategies by activating student's prior knowledge; monitoring, guiding, and encouraging students to utilize the comprehension strategies during reading; and after reading, encouraging student reflection both on the story and strategies the students utilized while reading (Stricklin, 2011). Educators using reciprocal teaching can expand student's comprehension and use of the strategies via visual and hands-on tools such as charts, bookmarks, paper plate dials, props, sticky notes, sentence starters, and graphic organizers (Stricklin, 2011). The most important part of utilizing reciprocal teaching is that students learn to use comprehension strategies while reading (Pilonieta & Medina, 2009). Reciprocal teaching can also be successful by pairing students to utilize peer tutoring (Iserbyt, Elen, & Behets, 2010).

Reciprocal teaching can be a means of engaging learners in texts including people with disabilities. For example, *Out of My Mind* can be utilized via reciprocal teaching techniques to strengthen student's comprehension skills. As this book is written in the voice of a character who speaks only via an augmentative communication device (AAC), students would have to expand their comprehension through questioning to find out what such a device is and how one works. Students would have to clarify and summarize throughout the book to follow the different parts of the story including the different characters, classmates, and important people in Melody's life. Finally, students could practice predicting as the story takes some unexpected turns which may surprise students and expand their understanding of social issues in schools, classrooms, communities, and their own lives. Other books discussed in this article could also be used with the reciprocal teaching techniques to help students learn and use comprehension strategies.

Literature Circles

Literature circles "provide a way for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss, and respond to books or other reading materials" (Cavanaugh, 2006, p.3) through processes that include engagement, choice, responsibility, and research (Daniels, 2006). Students are typically provided opportunities via literature circles to practice self-determination by self-selecting the literature groups study and are also expected to complete specific roles and responsibilities while in their circles (Blum, Lipsett, & Yocom, 2002). Some roles may include "discussion leader, vocabulary enricher, illustrator, and connector" (p. 100). Data on student's comprehension, higher level thinking, and writing related to their reading can be gathered

throughout the literature circle processes by educators. For example, *Wonder* could be a good book for students to read and discuss within literature circles, as the author utilizes many characters' voices throughout the book, the book explores many social circumstances and topics important to youth and adolescents, and students could practice critical inquiry while reading to discuss in depth the many multicultural issues throughout the story.

Books with strong characters that have disabilities can be great options for teachers when utilizing literature circles. Research has shown that literature circles can be a positive way to assist students in leading their own discussions about varied topics related to literature, including social class, roles, and other themes (Cavanaugh, 2006). Some student discussions may need to be guided and carefully observed by teachers who have educated themselves to the related themes in the texts to assist students in discussing and exploring them fully and without reinforcing bias, stereotypes, or prejudice (Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2011). Well-executed literature circles can also be a means for including students from all multicultural backgrounds, including English Language Learners (ELL) and students with a range of disabilities (Blum, Lipsett, & Yocom, 2002; Cavanaugh, 2006; Farris, Nelson, & L'Allier, 2007). Thus, incorporating books about characters with varied disabilities can expand student's own backgrounds, interests, and learning needs.

Critical Literacy Practices

In order for students to explore texts that include people with disabilities on a deeper level, we suggest using the five critical literacy practices described by Ciardiello (2004). They include examining multiple perspectives, finding an authentic voice, recognizing social barriers and overcoming borders of separation, regaining one's identity and listening and responding to "the call of service" (p. 138). The goal of these practices is to enable students to have critical conversations and become conscious consumers of texts.

Examining multiple perspectives is an important element to critical literacy. By analyzing the perspectives, students are able to recognize that information within texts can be construed from many viewpoints and not just the ones present in the literature. It also helps students identify those perspectives which are not present and consider why they are missing. Students can take this one step further by assuming the role of different characters throughout the book in a "hot seat" activity. Finding an authentic voice refers to recognizing those who are able to express themselves freely in the text. Essentially this means identifying who has been silenced and who has been supported within the text. Recognizing social barriers and overcoming borders of separation allows students the chance to identify those characters and characteristics which society positions as acceptable and valuable. By moving past these social boundaries, students can learn to appreciate our society's mix of citizens and cultures. Students can consider what social barriers exist in today's society and how we may overcome them in our own communities. Educators could utilize many of the texts reviewed, including *Five Flavors* to explore multiple perspectives such as those with in the hearing culture, Deaf culture, Rock music culture, socioeconomic status, and other perspectives intertwined throughout the story.

A further component of critical literacy practices is regaining one's identity, which occurs when someone is able to strip away the layers of prejudice and oppression that have dominated one's self-image. For example from *Five Flavors*, students could explore the layers of prejudice and

oppression that has occurred to members of Deaf Culture within the hearing culture. Until this time, one may believe the dominant group's position through the process of internalized oppression. This can open the door for discussion into how different people are treated within both local and global societies. Students can record instances of insensitive or callous behaviors and remarks they witness throughout the week and share them as a class. What do these instances say about our society?

The final critical literacy practice involves listening and responding to "the call of service" which requires that students assume civic responsibility. Students need to be aware of how they impact society. All of the texts provide strong examples of characters that took control of their situations and acted accordingly. Some questions for educators to use within discussions when utilizing texts that include people with disabilities may include: Do students see people in their community who don't have a voice or aren't heard? What can they do about the situation? How can students take an active role in making our society a more socially just and peaceful place to live?

Final Thoughts

Dr. Katherine Schneider, founder of the Schneider Family Book Award which is an award that focuses on literature with strong characters with disabilities, had this to say about books portraying people with disabilities:

They're stories about people and the people with disabilities in them are not super heroes, they are just people. I think it helps kids without disabilities to understand what life is like with a disability. And the more they understand, the less they'll avoid their classmate who has a disability (as quoted by Sullivan, 2011).

The recently published books evaluated in this article and the teaching strategies shared can be an important starting point for educators while learning about and teaching texts including people with disabilities. Children's literature specifically focused on these characters can be one tool teachers can use to promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of diverse students with disabilities (Prater, et al., 2006).

The ever-expanding definitions of multicultural literature within education is important for all educators to understand and incorporate into their classrooms, especially within the literature used when teaching academic, content, and social knowledge (Gay, 2002; Liebowitz, 2013). The more recently published juvenile literature reviewed in this article are good examples of literature including people with disabilities that could be used by educators to teach using methods such as reciprocal teaching, literacy circles, and critical literacy strategies. The evaluations of these texts exemplify to educators how important it is to understand how to adequately appraise books that include people with disabilities. Finally, utilizing well-written texts that include people with disabilities can be a way to successfully engage readers because of the expansive backgrounds such literature can involve. As Causarano (2012) states:

If educators are ready to embrace this challenge [incorporating literature that includes people with disabilities], students in American schools will have the opportunity to see

individuals with disabilities as an integral and systematic part of the diversity landscape (p. 12).

By utilizing the ideas and suggestions in this article, educators can better include all students and assist them to gain a broader view of literature and diversity.

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