INCLUSIVITY THROUGH LITERATURE

Teachers’ Use of Children’s Literature that Accurately Portrays Individuals with Exceptionalities in Inclusive Classrooms

By

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Abstract

This study investigated how teachers’ use of children’s literature that accurately portrays individuals with exceptionalities might play a role in supporting an inclusive learning environment. Students with exceptionalities are a reality for the majority of teachers in Ontario, and children’s literature can be a powerful tool for learning. Children’s literature can allow educators to help connect with their students and can help students understand the world around them. Children’s literature that accurately portrays individuals with exceptionalities can help teachers teach understanding and acceptance to their students. Through this research, face-to-face interviews with three teachers in Ontario were conducted, and inclusivity strategies currently in place for students with exceptionalities in general education classrooms were investigated. Preliminary findings showed that teachers use a variety of strategies to make their classrooms more inclusive for all students, teachers promote inclusion in their classrooms through: a) sharing and generating discussion about specific children’s literature containing accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities and c) encouraging understanding and empathy; and b) open discussions with all students. Thirdly, Teachers face a lack of funding when it comes to support and resources for students with exceptionalities. The last theme that emerged from the data was that teachers face a lack of awareness and knowledge about support and available resources such as children’s literature portraying characters with disabilities.

Key Words: Children’s Literature, Disabilities, Exceptionalities, Inclusion
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

Students with exceptionalities and disabilities are a growing population within schools in Ontario (Bennett, 2009), causing a challenge for teachers in how to create an inclusive classroom where all students feel accepted. An exceptional pupil is defined as:

a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program by a committee, established under subparagraph iii of paragraph 5 of subsection 11 (1), of the board, (a) of which the pupil is a resident pupil, (b) that admits or enrols the pupil other than pursuant to an agreement with another board for the provision of education, or (c) to which the cost of education in respect of the pupil is payable by the Minister. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, p. A3)

Similarly, an exceptionality can be identified as 1) a behavioral exceptionality; 2) communication exceptionalities which includes learning disabled, autistic, language impairment, speech impairment, hard of hearing, and intellectual; 3) intellectual exceptionalities which include gifted, mild intellectual disability, developmental disability; 4) physical disability which includes blind-low vision, physical disability; and 5) multiple exceptionalities (Peel District School Board, 1999).

A disability is the result of an injury or deficiency that could be seen as physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these (Wikepedia, 2013). Although the two terms do not have the exact same definition and are not synonymous, for the purposes of this paper, they will be used interchangeably.

One practice for students with exceptionalities in the public system of education is for students to be segregated and placed in separate classrooms or schools, with fewer
student-to-teacher ratio to ensure that their education is more focused towards their individual needs. Today, in many schools, there continues to be these segregated classrooms for students with severe challenges, but more and more, students with exceptionalities are not segregated from the rest of their peers but are being integrated or mainstreamed into general education classrooms. According to school board statistics, “most students with special needs spend at least 50 per cent of their instructional day in a regular classroom, being taught by regular classroom teachers” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 2). The majority of general education classrooms in Ontario have more than one student identified with exceptionalities (Bennett, 2009). Educators need to be keenly aware of these students in their classrooms and need to use effective strategies to create an inclusive community to ensure that these students feel included and accepted in the general education classroom. Teachers use many strategies to be inclusive and to meet the specific needs of students with exceptionalities, and one such strategy is the use of appropriate children’s literature that accurately portrays individuals with exceptionalities. This study investigates this strategy to see the impact it might have on student learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers’ use of children’s literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities might play a role in supporting an inclusive learning environment. Through this study, I investigated ways that teachers use children’s literature to help students with exceptionalities feel included in general education classrooms, and I specifically focused on the use of children’s literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities as a strategy.
Research Questions

My main research question is how might the use of children’s literature that accurately portrays individuals with exceptionalities play a role in supporting an inclusive learning environment? The sub-questions that were considered included:

1) What strategies do teachers use to make their classrooms more inclusive to all students, including those with exceptionalities?

2) How do teachers use children’s literature, and specifically children’s literature containing accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities, to teach and support inclusion in their general education classrooms?

3) What criteria do teachers use when selecting children’s literature to use with their students?

4) What challenges do teachers face when using children’s literature containing characters with disabilities to promote an inclusive classroom atmosphere?

This study is important to the education community because it allows educators to see the potential of using children’s literature containing accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities to build classroom community, especially for students with exceptionalities.

Background of the Researcher

Being a student with Tourette’s syndrome, and having a learning disability myself, along with a sister and boyfriend with a hearing impairment, this topic is extremely important to me. Growing up in the public school system in Ontario, I never fully understood my own exceptionality and why I had to be in a smaller classroom with
a different teacher for certain subjects. I was allowed to sit in the back of the classroom and could go on walks if I felt that I needed it during class time. When I was diagnosed with Tourette’s syndrome, my parents used a book titled *Hi, I’m Adam: A child’s story of Tourette’s syndrome*, by Adam Buehrens (1991). The book was written by a ten year old boy living with Tourette’s syndrome. The boy in the story was just like me; he did things that he could not control. At a time in my life when I was scared and confused and nothing made sense, this book gave me hope. By sharing this book with me, my parents allowed me to connect to another child with Tourette’s. It showed me that I was not the only person who had this syndrome and it allowed me to connect with my emotions. Thinking back to my schooling experiences, having my teacher share this book with my peers would have helped me tremendously. Having it read out loud to the class would have answered any questions that my peers may have had that I was too afraid to answer. I believe that using this book in the classroom would have made me feel more a part of the classroom community when I was a young girl who was scared because she was recently diagnosed with Tourette’s syndrome.

Now being a teacher candidate and soon-to-be teacher, and based on my past and present experiences in the classroom, I believe that it is important for educators to select children’s literature that accurately reflects the diversity of the students in the class. Teachers need to be aware of the school community around them and let the literature in the classroom be a reflection of that diverse community. If there is a student with same sex parents, teacher candidates are taught to bring in literature that portrays same sex parents to help to make that child feel more accepted. I believe that it is important for teachers to do the same for students with exceptionalities. If there is a hearing impaired student in a classroom, I believe that there must be multiple books in the classroom
library that have characters with hearing impairments in them. It will help explain any questions that students may have about why this student may look different and speak differently than they do. I believe that bringing literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities will help students with disabilities in the general education classroom feel included and accepted into the classroom community. Children’s literature I believe is a great tool to use with children, because of the lasting effect that it can have on children. As a child, I remember how much I loved being read to and reading myself. I looked forward to my parents reading to me before bed and I was excited when I was able to finally read on my own. I was so excited to go the public library to pick out new books to read every week. Now, when I am in my practicum placements, I always choose the books that I loved as a child to share with my students to allow them to feel the joy that I had as a child.

As a teacher candidate, inclusion and inclusivity is constantly a topic of discussion in the majority of my classes, but, there is a lack of discussion of children’s literature highlighting the inclusion of students with exceptionalities. During the first year in my two-year teacher education program, I found that acceptance, community, empathy and inclusivity for all students were explicitly taught to teacher candidates. The focus, however, was on ethnicity, race, religion, and sexuality. Teacher candidates were taught to use specific literature and lesson plans to celebrate differences in heritage and backgrounds. Teacher candidates were taught strategies to prevent racism and prejudice in the classroom. Being a teacher candidate with an exceptionality myself, I felt as though there was no discussion of strategies or teaching ideas that help to promote inclusivity for children with exceptionalities. In my second year of my program, I took a full year course (36 hours plus readings and assignments) entitled *Adaptive Instruction* and am happy to
report that there was more discussion about children with exceptionalities in this class, but in my opinion, there was still room for more focus to be placed on teachers’ use of children’s literature portraying individuals with exceptionalities and how this strategy might help all students in the class, especially those with exceptionalities. Through this study, I gained insight into how teachers in Ontario are using children’s literature to help their students with exceptionalities feel included, accepted in the classroom and happy about who they are.

Overview

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature where I discuss how educators define inclusion, the impact that children’s literature has on students, and how individuals with exceptionalities are represented currently in children’s literature. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedures that were used in this study, including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 provides the findings of my research, including the themes that emerged and connections to the literature, and Chapter 5 is the discussion of the findings, implications to the field, and ideas/topics for future research. References and appendices follow at the end.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, teachers use many strategies to be inclusive and to meet the specific needs of students with exceptionalities, and one such strategy is the use of appropriate children’s literature that accurately portrays individuals with exceptionalities. This study investigates this strategy to see the impact it might have student learning. This review of the literature includes an exploration of the research presented on the topics of: 1) inclusion including exploration of the terms exceptionalities and disabilities; and 2) how the effective use of children’s literature containing the appropriate portrayal of characters with exceptionalities can affect children with and without exceptionalities.

Definition of Exceptionalities and Disabilities

For this research, the term exceptionality is mostly used, as it is the current term used in the province of Ontario regarding students who are formally identified as part of the Special Education program; that is, a student is considered to be exceptional if they have been formally brought to the school support team by the teacher or parent, have been through an official Special Education Identification Review Committee (IPRC) process involving the teacher, support staff, principal, and parents, and are formally identified as exceptional and requiring a modified program tailored to his/her needs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001). A student can be considered to have an exceptionality if they have ongoing behaviour issues, communication difficulties, such as Autism, Deaf or hard of hearing, language impairment, speech impairment, Learning Disability to name a few), intellectual difficulties (giftedness, mild intellectual disability,
developmental disability), a physical disability, and/or a combination of the above (Bennett, 2009: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; Peel Board of Education, 1999).

As previously discussed, the term *disability* is defined as the consequence of an impairment that may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001; Wikipedia, 2013). As stated in the Introduction, for the purposes of this paper, the two terms, disabilities and exceptionalities, are used interchangeably.

**Inclusion**

Integration or inclusion of special needs students into general education classrooms was introduced because resource classrooms and self-contained classrooms and such programs were deemed to be ineffective and stigmatizing for these students (Simpson, 2004). Some people still believe that segregation or segregated special education classrooms can benefit the students in them because these students are in smaller settings and are better able to receive the support they require. However, this thinking is usually the result of frustrations faced by educators and parents when the needs of these students are not being adequately addressed in regular classrooms. For example, WomanatMile0 (2007) stated on her blog, (http://womanatmile0.wordpress.com/2007/04/03/segregation-for-special-needs-children-a-good-idea/),

… inclusion isn’t working so let’s quit trying and go back to segregation for the kids with high needs. Why isn’t ‘let’s fight to ensure teachers have the resources required to ensure inclusion is supported properly’ the solution to this issue? Why isn’t the answer, ‘let’s ensure all teachers receive the special education instruction support they require, for both special needs and gifted students’? When will we learn that when we isolate children (and adults), out of sight and out of mind, it harms our society as a whole? ….
Segregation is not cheap either and the developmental detriment of long term placement in these settings for children with special needs can never be undone. These children need to be in inclusive settings, where they can be with all of their peers that represent a rainbow spectrum of different cultures, and abilities. I believe the answer is to fight for the funding to properly include all children in typical settings.

Integration or inclusion of special needs students into general education classrooms where they receive the appropriate support, therefore, is a better alternative. Dixon (2005) confirms this when he contends that segregation of students with exceptionalities need teachers who are trained specifically in Special Education and who have the education and skills to be able to work with a variety of needs and disabilities.

Integration or inclusion of students with special needs is a reality in classrooms across Ontario (Bennett, 2009). Within the province of Ontario, “300,000 students require some sort of special education” (Bennett, 2009, p.1), and general education teachers are faced with the task of having students with exceptionalities integrated into the classroom. Educators are becoming more aware of the unique needs and abilities of their students.

What does inclusion look like, sound like or feel like in a classroom? How can it be defined? McMaster (2012) states that there is no one single definition of inclusion and that the term should be viewed like a spectrum rather than a measurable goal. All classrooms are as unique as the students who are in them. The inclusion strategy in place in each classroom should reflect the individual needs of the students. Inclusion began as the practice of integration or mainstreaming special needs students (McMaster, 2012). Now inclusion is “concerned with the quality of participation and that all of the students are participating” (McMaster, 2012, p. 12). Teachers now more than ever are concerned
about the inclusion of all of their students; inclusion is no longer just a special education issue; it involves everybody (McMaster, 2012).

McMaster (2012) further discussed inclusion as an issue of social justice, which applies to all minority groups. The definition of a minority can be a challenge since it is difficult to decide what exactly it means to be considered a minority since it does not refer necessarily to numbers. McMaster (2012) states that it applies to all individuals who are “treated as if one’s position and perspective are of less worth; to be silenced or marginalized” (p. 12). Inclusion has moved away from only the interests of those children categorized as special needs but has become an umbrella term to support every student in the classroom to make sure that all feel as though they belong (McMaster, 2012).

**Societal barriers.**

McMaster (2012) believes that individuals with exceptionalities do not have disabilities; they have impairments. “These impairments become barriers due to societal constructs” (p. 14). The strongest barrier for people with disabilities is the attitude towards these individuals (McMaster, 2012). In order to create an inclusive school community, McMaster states that we would have to “create a school community that is free of barriers which would lead to meaningful participation” (p. 13). “Creating an inclusive school community involves a transformation in education and schools; it is a new way of thinking” (p. 14). This type of education system must break down the negative social images of people with disabilities. Current adults with disabilities are still facing the societal barriers that our children face in schools.

Boyle (1997) through his research found that individuals with disabilities are continuously stigmatized negatively into their adult lives (p. 262). It is through education
at a young age that teachers can break down these barriers that individuals with disabilities encounter and make them feel accepted instead of rejected (Boyle, 1997).

**The Power of Literature**

This study explores how teachers’ use of children’s literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities might play a role in supporting an inclusive learning environment. Reading stories to children and having children read independently can have a profound effect on their life (Hambleton, 2001). Hambleton (2001) states that literature deals with the universals of life. “Love, hate, birth, death, joy, sorrow, loss and recovery” (p. 3) are all issues that each individual will have at some point in their life experiences. Children’s literature allows students to understand their world around them and shows them that their actions may have consequences (Hambleton, 2001). It allows students to go beyond the world that they know, and use their imaginations to create their own world as they see it. Not only does it allow students to go beyond the four walls of the classroom, reading literature allows students to build and expand their vocabulary (Hambleton, 2001). Stories can make children who feel lost or alone feel accepted and they may not be alone with their feelings (Hambleton, 2001).

Kent and Simpson (2012) discussed the importance of a classroom community and the role that the use of children’s literature can play in creating a positive classroom environment. “Using appropriate literature can help establish a positive classroom …. Celebrating, honouring, and respecting differences of the characters in the texts lays down the foundations for recognizing and respecting individual differences within the classroom community” (p.29). Through literature, students can learn the traits: respect,
safety, inclusiveness, and caring through the character development initiative by the Ontario Government Finding Common Grounds (2008).

**Children’s Literature and Disability**

As individuals living with exceptionalities, the use of children’s literature can become very important and can illustrate to the individual identified or labeled as different or special that he/she is not alone (Wopperer, 2011). “Literature provides the necessary perspectives for children and young adults with disabilities to see themselves differently, more positively” (Wopperer, 2011, p. 28). According to Prater, Dyches and Johnstun (2006), children’s literature that portrays characters with disabilities helps children become aware and understand their peers with disabilities. Literature can act as a security blanket for those children and provides them with the message that they are not the only one with this exceptionality. Seeing characters like themselves who are strong individuals and believable can build the self-esteem of these students (Wopperer, 2011).

Children with disabilities are not befriended as quickly as students without disabilities and this can be due to ignorance or a lack of exposure (Wopperer, 2011). In the primary grades, it may be a student’s first exposure to an individual with an exceptionality and using literature to help explain it may help answer any questions due to children’s natural curiosity. Prater et al. (2006) states that “using picture books that have characters with disabilities may help students understand their own feelings and reactions towards these individuals” (p. 21). They can ask themselves, “Have I ever made fun of kids who need extra help at school? Or how can I stand up for kids with learning disabilities when they are being teased?” (p.21). Reading literature that has accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities brings awareness to students and allows them to
have an understanding about why some students need extra help, or go for walks to release energy, wear hearing aids or sit in wheelchairs.

**The Portrayal of Characters with Disabilities in Children’s Literature**

Although we would like the characters with disabilities to be portrayed positively in children’s literature, this may not always be the case. In reviewing children’s literature containing characters with disabilities, questions such as the following were asked: How are the characters with disabilities portrayed in children’s literature? Are the characters viewed as strong individuals who face challenges and overcome them? Are the characters portrayed as positive role models for children with exceptionalities? Can reading literature with characters with disabilities help the self-esteem of a child with a disability? What other effects might reading literature with characters with disabilities influence a child with a disability? Can reading literature with characters with disabilities provide benefits to children without disabilities?

A number of important research studies were conducted reviewing children’s literature containing characters with disabilities (Ayala, 1999; Beckett, Ellison, Barrett & Shah, 2010; Golos and Moses, 2011). Beckett, et al. (2010) did a study with 100 primary age children’s literature most readily available to United Kingdom students. Thirty of the books in this study had outdated language that is now viewed as offensive and discriminatory towards people with disabilities. As well, 33 books contained evidence of a tragic view of disability. For example, the author of one of the books in the study was trying to elicit sympathy rather than empathy from the readers (Beckett, et al., 2010). The books in this study promoted the negative stereotype that individuals with disabilities are to blame for their barriers, not society. The impairment was viewed as a problem for
the individual and that it was biological and not social barriers that caused this character’s disability (Beckett, et al., 2010).

Eight of the books studied had an unrealistic happy ending to the story. The disabled character suddenly “had a miracle cure of their impairment and the books appeared to be a fantasy” (Beckett, et al., 2010, p. 380). Although, a “happily ever after ending” (p. 380) is fun and satisfying to the reader or listener, to a child with an exceptionality, an unrealistic ending is not being fair to them. Since they might have a permanent impairment, seeing a character like them have a miracle cure is unjust and can be upsetting to the child (Beckett, et al., 2010).

Forty of the books studied by Beckett, et al. (2010) viewed disabilities as part of diversity. These books conveyed the message that disabled people are not an “other” or “outsider” and are full members of our society and community (p. 382). The disabled character(s) in the books are “viewed as included and at times is not referred to in the text, only in the illustrations” (p. 380).

Ayala (1999) did a study of the portrayal of individuals with disabilities in children’s literature and he found that the majority of the characters with disabilities were portrayed as a “poor little thing” or a “brave little soul” (p. 111). Like Becket et al. (2010), Ayala (1999) found that the reader has sympathy for the character(s) with disabilities, instead of empathy. Therefore, how the characters with disabilities are portrayed are often not as positive as they should be.

Golos and Moses (2011) performed a study about the portrayal of Deaf characters in 20 children’s picture books. They found that more picture books “portray Deaf characters from a medical rather than from a cultural perspective” (p. 279). Deaf children who do not have a Deaf role model in their lives will see deafness as a medical problem
that can and should be fixed in order to make them hearing, and they learn that they must rely on communication strategies that hearing people use (Golos & Moses, 2011). These books show evidence that Deaf children, without the interventions of good role models, will be angry, isolated, and unable to function in real life. It is critical for children with exceptionalities that children’s literature portrays exceptionalities positively and not negatively. This then becomes an appropriate portrayal of characters with disabilities. These children may have nowhere else to turn and literature can help them believe in themselves (Golos & Moses, 2011).

To summarize, there is a variety of children’s literature published about children with disabilities. In fact, Ayala (1999) found that there was a “61 percent increase in the number of books published with characters with disabilities from 1974 to 1988” (p. 110). Also, different types of disabilities discussed in the books increased as well (Ayala, 1999). However, not enough of the published children’s literature in print portrays characters with disabilities and impairments as individuals who can function properly and successfully in society (Golos & Moses, 2011).

This study explores to what extent can using literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities play a role in supporting an inclusive learning environment and how can it affect the inclusivity within a general education classroom. Based on the research found, the production of children’s literature has increased but the way in which these characters are portrayed still need some growth. The characters in these books need to reflect individuals with disabilities proud, strong and happy (Ayala, 1999; Beckett, et al., 2010; Golos & Moses, 2011).
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Instruments of Data Collection

For this study, I reviewed the literature about the topics of: 1) inclusion including exploration of the terms exceptionalities and disabilities; and 2) how the effective use of children’s literature containing the appropriate portrayal of characters with exceptionalities can affect children with and without exceptionalities. I also conducted two informal interviews. Turner (2010) discusses interviews and how they “provide in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic” (p. 754). From his research, I believe that informal interviews are the best type of interview to use for my research. Informal interviews rely on the interaction with the participants to guide the interview process (Turner, 2010). During my interviews, I worked at not asking any leading questions and to making my questions as bias free as possible, allowing my participants to answer as truthfully as possible. (See Appendix A for the interview questions.)

Participants

For this study, I initially found it challenging to find participants to interview for my study. The two participants in my study were recommended to me by my peers and colleagues in schools as possibilities for my study, and after I connected with them, they agreed to be interviewed. I then met with them for face-to-face interviews, which were audio taped with their permission.

My participants are general education teachers who are currently teaching in schools in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario. Both of these participants currently have at least one student with an exceptionality in their classes. This is important to my
research because through the interviews, I was aiming to discover the inclusion activities that the teacher has put into place or used that help make the student with an exceptionality feel a part of the classroom community. Both participants do not have any special education qualifications but have worked with students with exceptionalities throughout their teaching careers.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

For each of the interviews, I made an auto recording with each participant’s permission. Afterwards, I transcribed each of the interviews for the purpose of analysis. I began by reading and rereading the transcribed interview data looking for common words, phrases, and themes. I focused on what types of children’s literature were being used in the classroom, if literature was used to promote inclusivity in the classroom, and what and if inclusivity strategies were in place in that teacher’s classroom. I looked at whether or not the teacher chose to use literature in the classroom that is an accurate portrayal of the students and the school community. I used different coloured highlighter markers, underlined, used asterisks, and made a chart to highlight the important quotes and insights in the interview data. I wrote some ideas of themes as my first draft, and also made notes to myself as I went along.

Having no previous background in research or in coding, this was all new to me. I sent my first draft of these themes and my thinking to my research supervisor. She told me that I was on the right track but suggested that my themes be in full sentences. She also suggested that I reread the handouts and professional articles about data analysis which were referenced or posted on our course site, as well as look at Chapter 4 of previous MTRPs for ideas about expectations and format.
After following her advice, I then came up with five themes written in full sentences (see Chapter 4 for the themes and findings), and these were related more to my main and sub-questions (see Chapter 1 for my research questions).

Upon reflection on my research process, I realized that the data analysis part of writing a thesis can be a never ending process. Wellington (2000) discusses the five stages in data analysis, and through his work, I have come to understand the first stage that is *immersion*. Wellington (2000) states that this is the stage of immersing oneself into the data, the active reading, highlighting, and at times experiencing a drowning or sinking feeling. At that point in the process, I felt fully immersed in my data and found myself re-reading and re-highlighting multiple times. Just when I felt as though I had finished my coding, there was something I missed in the data and had to do it all again. At times, I did feel like I was drowning in work but I knew that this was a long process and was the final and last step to completing my MTRP. I learned something new every time I looked at my data, and each time I felt as though I was reading under a new lens trying to make new connections.

Being a new researcher, I have come to realize that there is no one way to analyze data. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) discuss the meaning of coding and the goal of the researcher, which is making sense of what has been learned. I believe that that is the task that I worked through. I tried to find out what I learned from my research, and how it can help future educators. As I read and re-read my data, I was searching for the themes, the common language among the participants and patterns among the two interviews and the literature review. Anfara, et al. (2002) state how eclectic the process of data analysis can be and that there is no right way to do. As I read this, it was very
reassuring to hear and to know that other researchers felt the same way as I did: lost and confused at times, wondering if what they are doing is correct.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

All interviewees took part in the research on a voluntary basis. They were sent a letter of consent prior to the interview date, which they read, and signed signifying their willingness to participate (See Appendix B for the Letter of Consent). The letter states that the participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any time and remain anonymous through pseudonyms. Their involvement will be kept confidential, ensuring the participants’ protection from personal or professional harm. The participants and I kept a copy of the consent letter for both of our records. I allowed the participants to choose the time and location of the interview to make it more convenient for them and to make them feel more comfortable during the interview.

**Limitations**

Due to the small sample size of two, the opinions of the participants may not accurately represent the diverse opinion of educators in Ontario and cannot be generalized to represent all teachers. Although this research has a small sample size, it is appropriate to the expectations for this study and my program. I also believe that this study has provided me, as well as others reading this paper, with insights on how teachers in Ontario use children’s literature, especially those containing characters with disabilities, and other strategies to create inclusive classrooms for their students with exceptionalities.
A second limitation of the study is the limited time that I had to complete the research. Only having ten months to complete chapters 1, 2 and 3, and then another ten months to conduct my interviews, analyze the findings, and write the paper, all within an extremely busy teacher education program of study, may have hindered the extent of my research. If I want to continue my research, it will have to be in a dissertation if and when I choose to complete my doctorate after completing my Master degree.

A third limitation of the study was my inability, because of the guidelines of the Master of Teacher Ethical Review process, to observe and interview students. To accurately understand how students with exceptionalities feel in general education classrooms, I believe that the researcher needs to observe those students in their classrooms and speak with them one-on-one. Due to the small time frame and no access to students, I was unable to do so for this research study.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Participants

For my research, I conducted face-to-face interviews with two teachers currently teaching in Ontario. Both of my participants have been teaching for at least ten years and both of them are teaching in public school boards in the Greater Toronto Area. They are both currently teaching primary grades but have experience with the junior grades as well. I selected these teachers because they both were teachers who used a variety of inclusion strategies in their classrooms, and they were both willing to be involved in this study.

Mary (pseudonym).

Teacher 1, Mary has been teaching for ten years in a public school board in the Greater Toronto Area. She is currently teaching a grade two and three combined class and has no formal training in special education. Mary usually has students with exceptionalities in her classroom, with the exception of this current year. When asked what experience she has had with students with exceptionalities, she replied: “At least every year, except for this year, I have at least one child on the spectrum, so a child with ASD. Then there are always LD students, and accommodated and modified students”. She currently has a student who was just identified as gifted, but there is no formal Individual Education Plan (IEP) for that student yet. She is hoping to have him on an IEP soon, so will most likely have a student with an exceptionality in her class before the end of this year.

The school in which Mary is currently teaching is a kindergarten to grade six school. The school has a home school program (HSP) where students who have been identified as exceptional and have an IEP are in a smaller classroom in the morning for
literacy and math, and then in the afternoons, these students go into general education classes for art, music, social studies, and physical education. The students who are in the HSP program are usually two grade levels behind, and in the mornings, they receive more one-on-one support. The school in which Mary is teaching also has a special education resource teacher (SERT) who works one-on-one with students who are identified with an IEP. These students are either supported by the SERT in their classroom or are with withdrawn from the classroom by the SERT to be supported with appropriate accommodations and modifications. Mary’s school also has a special education behavioral class where the class size is smaller, and there is a Child and Youth Worker (CYW) and a qualified special education teacher in the classroom at all times and the day is shortened for these students until 2 o’clock.

Cynthia (pseudonym).

The second participant, Teacher 2, Cynthia has been teaching in the Greater Toronto Area for 17 years and has no formal training in special education. She is currently in a general education teaching role and is teaching a grade one class in a kindergarten to grade eight school. When she was asked what experience she had with students with exceptionalities, she replied,

Every child is exceptional. The first thing we need to know, and I have had the opportunity to work with children that have exceptionalities that don’t go away. I’ve had children with wheelchairs and Autism, ADHD, ADD, low income background, difficulties because their families are going through divorce or illness. Every child has exceptionalities. It is really important to remember every child is exceptional and that depending on the day determines what that child’s needs may be. It is very important to be always aware of who your students are and understand what they may be bringing to school.

When Cynthia was asked if she currently had students with exceptionalities in her classroom, she responded: “Yes…. I have children who are from the Autism classroom
that are integrated into my classroom for specific subjects, and then there are some children that may have some needs that may not have been identified”. Cynthia’s school has a brain injury classroom (ABI) for children who have suffered severe injuries. There is also an Autism classroom for children with high needs who cannot be fully integrated into a general education classroom. Some of these students are integrated for parts of the day and others are not. This all depends on their needs and the time of the day.

**Themes**

The following themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data collected as connected to the literature:

**Theme 1:** Teachers use a variety of strategies to make their classrooms more inclusive for all students including: a) the use of technology; b) the use of grouping; c) understanding and using multiple intelligences; d) the use of Tribes; e) connecting curriculum to students’ interests; and f) collegial support.

**Theme 2:** Teachers promote inclusion in their classrooms through: a) sharing, generating discussion, and encouraging understanding and empathy using specific children’s literature containing accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities; and b) open discussions with all students.

**Theme 3:** Teachers face a lack of funding when it comes to support and resources for students with exceptionalities.

**Theme 4:** Teachers face a lack of awareness and knowledge about available support and resources such as children’s literature portraying characters with disabilities.

**Theme 1:** Teachers use a variety of strategies to make their classrooms more inclusive for all students including: a) the use of technology; b) the use of grouping; c) understanding and using multiple intelligences; d) the use of Tribes; e) connecting curriculum to students’ interests; and f) collegial support.

In order to create inclusive classrooms, teachers need to find ways or strategies to create an environment where all of their students feel safe and included. These strategies
may not be the same for every teacher or classroom (McMaster, 2012). McMaster contended that there is no one single definition of inclusion and that the term should be viewed like a spectrum rather than a measurable goal. All classrooms are as unique as the students who are in them. The strategies in place should reflect the range of needs and abilities of the class. The two teachers interviewed mentioned a variety of strategies that helped them make their classrooms more inclusive for their students.

**The use of technology.**

In today’s classrooms, teachers use technology in many ways, including assistive technology for students with special needs. Schwartz and Pollishuke (2013) describe assistive technology as a term that refers to specific hardware and/or software that can help people who have learning and/or physical disabilities—for example, challenges with learning, vision, hearing, and mobility—in performing tasks that they might not have been able to accomplish without the technology. The following are some examples:

**Example 1:** Students with small-muscle coordination difficulties can find handwriting a challenge and often find a keyboard easier to manipulate than a pen or pencil.

**Example 2:** For students with a learning disability (i.e., who have difficulty learning), you can use scan and read software (such as Kurzweil 3000 or E-Text Reader), which helps students with reading disabilities to see the text on the computer screen as it “reads” aloud and highlights the word/sentence as it moves along. Speech recognition software (such as Dragon Naturally Speaking) can be used to help students compose on the computer without typing or writing because it records the speaker’s words as heard. A number of hours of training are needed for this computer program to learn to recognize the speech patterns of the user. (p. 250)

Grönlund, Lim, and Larsson, (2010) discuss how useful assistive technology is in creating an inclusive classroom environment for students with disabilities. Their study examined teachers’ use of assistive technology in two different countries and how it helped in creating a more inclusive community for their students. Although Mary does
not use assistive technology, she does use technology such as computers and tape recording devices at every opportunity as a strategy to help her students who need support. She said, “I definitely try and take advantage of the technology in the classroom…I allow students who need extra support time on the computer to type up their responses…I’ve also had students talk into a tape recorder”. She uses the technology resources in the classroom to help the students who need assistance to finish their work.

The use of technology as aids to learning, such as the computer and tape recorder, and the different assistive technologies available, provides all students with support in their own learning; their needs are being met in an engaging way, and they are included in their classroom community regardless of their abilities.

**The use of grouping.**

Collaborative and cooperative learning is an important strategy that is used in classrooms, not only to create inclusion but to teach students the importance of teamwork and respecting others and their ideas (Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013; Watson & Marshall, 1995). Mary partners her students to help foster cooperation, collaborative and skills, and an inclusive classroom environment. Mary said,

A strategy that I really like is putting them in groups and pairing them up with students with differences and different levels. I think it’s a strategy that motivates them and makes them feel included and allows them to be part of a discussion or part of an activity and play each other’s strengths. They may not be strong at writing but they’re in a group where they can offer their ideas.

By pairing or grouping the students of different abilities, it allows the students to use their abilities to their best capabilities and to help each other. The students share their ideas and collaboratively create a product. This strategy ensures that all of the students are included in the process and that each student’s strengths and abilities are being
acknowledged. Pairing or grouping students allows for the strengths in each student to come forward to create the best possible outcome (Kagan, 1990).

**Understanding and using Multiple Intelligences (MI).**

Gardner’s (2006) theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) states that there are eight intelligences in the human brain (Gardner, 2006). They are the following: musical–rhythmic, visual–spatial, verbal–linguistic, logical–mathematical, bodily–kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Gardner, 2006). Cynthia uses her knowledge about Gardner’s theory as an inclusion strategy in her classroom.

I believe in Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (MI). I believe it is important to teach things in more than one way because children learn in different ways. Some kids are auditory learners, some are visual learners, I think that we need to provide opportunities for children to do things in many ways partial so that they can learn what they like and what they are good at. I also think that you need to look at the children and the curriculum and their interests and finding the hook. How can I make this engaging for that child?

Understanding and using the knowledge about MI helps to ensure that all of the students understand the concept being taught. It allows for the students to explore their own different learning styles and intelligences, and allows them to see where their strengths and weaknesses are (Gardner, 2006). When Cynthia teaches the same lesson in a different way, it validates for students that their teacher understands their needs and wants them to feel included in their classroom.

**The use of Tribes.**

The use of Tribes Learning Community (www.tribes.com) is an inclusion strategy used throughout Canada, the United State, and Australia (Gibbs, 2006). The strategy is based on four classroom agreements that include the following: attentive listening, the right to participate and the right to pass, appreciations/no put downs, and mutual respect. Cynthia uses the Tribes agreements to make sure that all of her students are included in
her classroom. “We use Tribes, the norms, which I think is very important. It teaches them how to support one another”. The *Tribes* norms become an agreement to which the entire class commits. Usually, during the first week of school, the teacher explains each agreement to the class and the students can sign a class contract to ensure that the students abide to these agreements. These agreements allow the students to pass when they need to and do not penalize them for it. It sets up the classroom, not just as a classroom, but as a community, and creates an atmosphere where the students feel safe, included, and that they are there for one another (Gibbs, 2006).

**Connecting curriculum to students’ interests.**

Teachers are always looking for new and creative ways to make learning in the classroom engaging for their students. One strategy that Cynthia uses in her classroom is connecting the curricula to her students’ interests.

Curriculum drives part of it. You have to know your kids and know what their interests are. I think you need to find a way to make a connection between curriculum, interests, and abilities because you want to set children up to succeed whenever possible. It has to be a safe and secure environment for children to take a risk and that’s very important too.

Tying the students’ interests into the curricula keeps the students actively engaged. It allows Cynthia to make connections between what is being taught and their interests. By incorporating her students’ interests into her lessons, Cynthia is ensuring that she is creating lessons with which her students can connect and relate (Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013).

**Collegial support.**

The teaching field is a professional community where colleagues work together and are always sharing ideas with each other. In this community, teachers and other professionals are always seeking advice and support from one another (Dufour, 2004).
Mary discussed how when it comes to specific inclusion strategies in her classroom she would speak to more qualified teachers to brainstorm ideas.

That’s one thing I wish I was little better versed at. I would talk to the resource teacher or the HSP teacher to get some suggestions. There are also manipulatives on hand to use. I’ve had to prepare visual organizers for students. I would say that the strategies are really just based on what the lesson is going to be covering and what the need of the student is. It’s really a case by case context.

By speaking with a colleague, Mary reported that she might find a new strategy that she did not know about. She appears to be a lifelong learner who is continuously seeking answers and gaining new knowledge to help make her classroom a safe environment for all of her students.

**Theme 2: Teachers promote inclusion in their classrooms through: a) sharing, generating discussion, and encouraging understanding and empathy using specific children’s literature containing accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities; and b) open discussions with all students.**

Picture books are a tool that teachers use to help their students understand concepts in the classroom. They can be especially helpful when having difficult conversations with students in a class. Picture books are a useful tool because it allows the students to relate to and connect to the characters that they see in the story (Wopperer, 2011). Some teachers explicitly teach their students to relate and make text-to-self connections, text-to-text connections and text-to-world connections when reading any picture book (Golos & Moses, 2011; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013). Mary and Cynthia both discussed in their interviews how they use picture books in their classrooms to help navigate those challenging and sensitive conversations with their classes. Mary said,
One of the books I’ve used in the past is *Don’t Laugh at Me*, and it has a song and they absolutely love it, and it’s always something that we do for empathy for the month of November for the Character Ed assembly, and talk about the students portrayed in the story or in the song, and talk about how it might feel to be somebody who is different that might stand out visually, and we talk about the things on the inside and that is what matters more. There is a story called *It’s Ok to be Different*. They get really into that as well, and they like to share their experiences all around them. We also have an Autism Awareness campaign at our school and we do that at the end of the year and we talk about the different needs of different students.

Cynthia said,

I love picture books especially with young children. I think that children can empathize better when they can make connections. Picture books are a vehicle that allows children to make the connections either through the words or the pictures. For example the *Don’t Laugh at Me*…talks about children and how they are all different yet the same.

By using picture books to help the students empathize, students can see characters that resemble themselves or their community. They can connect better when they can relate to the characters that they are seeing. During the two interviews, the participants mentioned a few texts that they found useful (e.g., *Don’t Laugh at Me, It’s Ok to be Different, Be Good to Eddie Lee* and *Martin Luther Big Words*). As part of this research study, I have included (see Appendix C) Dyches and Prater’s (2008) top 25 books that portray characters with disabilities for children and young adults. These books are great examples of texts teachers can use when discussing the challenging topic of disabilities with your students. For example, the book *Hooway for Wodney Wat* by Helen Lester is about a rat character who stutters; the book *Thank you, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco is about a girl who has learning difficulties and is bullied because she can’t read, and at the end of the story, we find out that it is the author herself as a child; and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon, is a book for intermediate/secondary students about a young man who is Autistic and how he handles an
uncomfortable situation about a dead dog. Books such as these are good for teachers to know about and use with their class to meet the needs of all their students.

**Open discussions with all students.**

In order for a classroom to be inclusive, the students in the class need to feel safe and supported at all times (McMaster, 2011). Creating an inclusive classroom means that the students need to feel that they can come to you about anything and not be afraid of judgment. In order to create an inclusive classroom, the teacher must have open discussions with all of the students allowing them to ask any question regardless of the topic. Mary explained how she used an open discussion with her class in the past to discuss sensitive topics with her students. When discussing with her students the particular needs of a student in her classroom, she said,

I spoke with the children about how everyone is different and how we all have different needs and this is just something that he needs to make himself feel comfortable and good and that you might need a drink when you’re stressed out but he needs to put these on because his ears are sensitive and it makes him nervous and we are going to be supportive. This student has been with the same group of children for about four or five years now so they are aware of him and they understand. It is an ongoing conversation they’ve had with teachers. As long as it’s done in a positive way and you’re honest with the kids, they seem to get it.

By being open with her students, Mary allowed them to see that she is sensitive to her students’ feelings. By having open discussions with her students, Mary showed her students that she is available to discuss any topic, together as a class or privately.

Cynthia is an educator who believes that something does not have to be present in order to discuss it. She wants her students to be aware of their surroundings regardless if an exceptionality is currently present in her classroom. When asked if she would use literature to explain exceptionalities to her students, her response was,
I don’t think you need to have a child with exceptions in your class to explain exceptionalities. I think it’s important for children to be aware that we are all different and the same whenever you connect it you can.

By discussing disabilities with her students, Cynthia’s goal is to encourage understanding and empathy, and to raise awareness within her students. By using children’s literature containing characters with exceptionalities, both teachers are allowing this to be a topic within their classrooms and are encouraging this discussion within her school community.

Theme 3: Teachers face a lack of funding when it comes to support and resources for students with exceptionalities.

A common challenge that most teachers face in the field of teaching in public school board is a lack of funding. When asked about the challenges that are associated with integrating students’ disabilities in your classroom, Cynthia responded by saying “Money – we don’t have enough support. The board in my opinion isn’t able to hire the amount of people that are truly needed to support the children. There are not enough resources.” Cynthia felt as though her school board did not have enough resources and money to give the students the support that they need to succeed.

Mary in her interview never discussed funding as a challenge for her; however, in the literature, Dworet and Maich (2007) state that lack of funding in Canada happens because there is no federal funding of education in Canada. Each province must decide on their own for their educational budget, causing a lack of funding to happen in special education.

Theme 4: Teachers face a lack of awareness and knowledge about available support and resources such as children’s literature portraying characters with disabilities.

As presented in Chapter 2, Bishop, et al. (2010) questioned if educators in Ontario are accurately prepared to meet the diverse needs of the students in their classrooms.
During her interview, Mary noted that “at least every year, except for this year, I have at least one child on the spectrum, so a child with ASD”. Cynthia mentioned that the increase of students with Autism is rising and that the “teachers are not being trained properly to work with these children”. With the rise of students with exceptionalities in general education classrooms, one of the challenges that teachers may face is that they are not aware of the resources available to support them and their students. Mary discussed how her lack of knowledge, along with her lack of awareness about the supports and resources available were some of the challenges she faces when supporting her students.

I wish there were more resources available. It is something that I don’t see promoted a lot. I was just introduced to *Be Good to Eddie Lee* and that’s a great example. I don’t know any other resources besides those two or three books that are floating around our school. There are topics such as Black History Month and different campaigns, but I don’t feel there is a lot for people with exceptionalities and disabilities and I don’t feel that they are really represented.

Mary also discussed the lack of awareness within her school community as a challenge she faced when looking for appropriate resources. She brought up other campaigns of social justice within the school and how readily available those resources were. She said,

It’s a matter of sitting down and doing the research and finding what’s available. And it would be nice and I’m not a lazy person, but ‘here’s a list and they do this’, for ‘here’s a list of books on empathy’, ‘here’s a list of books for Black History Month’, and that’s great because it’s there and the librarian makes a table and it’s like ‘all right. I know where to go’. That would be nice. We have books on war and peace, and it would be nice to have a bin and we know we are representing this part of the population. That might be something that can be brought to the staff and we can discuss how we can have more faces represented in our literature.

Related to this lack of awareness, Cynthia discussed the lack of professional development (PD) for teachers on the topic of resources that support teachers and
students on the topic of exceptionalities. This lack of PD could also be due to a teacher’s lack of knowledge about the topic. Cynthia believes that

Education is having the knowledge yourself. You can seek it out but that depends on the individual teacher. Not everybody does that or (goes to the) professional development. (Some teachers may not know) how much PD is available to teachers? (Teachers may need to know about the PD) so that they can support those children.

A lack of knowledge about the resources available to them on the topic of accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities can lead to a lack of criteria or no criteria at all on the topic. When asked about the criteria used to find books, Cynthia discussed how her criterion is broader. She said, “I look for a diverse range of books that will depict individuals in different ways. It’s about making sure that there is representation of children from different communities, abilities, cultures and families”.

When Mary was asked about the criteria she uses in her classroom, her response was, “There is no criteria – it is more like ‘Wow! That book has some exposure to a child with a disability! Great!’”

In her interview, Mary discussed how there was not much representation of disabilities in books she knew. She said,

I think we try and have so much inclusivity with representing everybody and everybody’s story and books that reflect different cultures, religions, races, but we don’t do a lot with disabilities…I don’t think there is much out there and I think it is really important for the kids to see more of that.

To help raise awareness about the resources available to teachers, Appendix C is included in this MTRP and provides a list of 25 children’s literature titles that contain accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities (Dyches & Prater, 2008).
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Future Research

From this study, I wish that future researchers study how using literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities can affect students. Future studies can examine if using this type of literature can impact a student’s feelings towards individuals with exceptionalities. For future research, I believe that we need to observe a classroom community as it is. Then one could observe a classroom community after literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities is shared with the class. A researcher could visit a classroom multiple times in one year to see how the classroom community has changed from one visit from another. Through a study as such, researchers can gain insight into students’ reactions and feelings towards this type of literature. Researchers can gain insight into how effective literature is creating an inclusive atmosphere for all of the students.

Implications/Recommendations

Through this research, I have come to the realization that to do this study properly, I should have conducted face-to-face interviews with multiple teachers, including a special education resource teacher, teacher librarians and even parents of students with exceptionalities. Due to the small amount of time that I had to complete my research, I was unable to do so. I believe based upon the research that I found that the true problem with discussing exceptionalities with our students is awareness. It is through my research that I have come to the understanding that teachers who have no formal training in special education are not aware of the specific children’s literature with accurate portrayals of individuals’ disabilities and exceptionalities. As educators, I
believe that we need to educate ourselves on the resources to help create an inclusive environment for all of our students. When I asked Mary about the supports she suggests to help overcome her challenges, she responded by saying “The internet would have to be my support to find books that represent different abilities for sure”. As Mary suggested, the internet is a fantastic source for teachers to do research on literature that discusses disabilities. It is through this research that I now know a collection of children’s literature to use in my future classroom to create an inclusive atmosphere. Thorough this research, I think that pre-service teachers should be aware of the rich resources available and should have the knowledge going into the field on how to bring literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities into their classrooms.

I would like to end this paper with a quote from my research participant Cynthia. When asked about how she would explain exceptionalities to her students, Cynthia responded by saying,

I don’t think you need to have a child with exceptions in your class to explain to address exceptionalities. I think it’s important for children to be aware that we are all different and the same and whenever you can connect it you can. For example, when I was teaching grade 2 and we did simple machines it made sense to look at a wheelchair and bring that forward. It’s not about having the child there to bring forth the knowledge. I think that we need to create opportunities to bring information into the classroom to allow children to ask question and not be afraid. I think that when we don’t understand creates fear I think that knowledge takes away the fear. I think familiarity is for children important and that they have a safe place to come to, to ask questions without judgment and asking these questions in a respectful manner.

I believe it is through my researcher lens and the ideas of teachers like Cynthia and Mary that classrooms become more safe and inclusive for all students. It is teachers like Cynthia and Mary who will make a difference in this work and it is one of the reasons why I became a teacher.
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Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education.


Appendix A: Interview Questions

Main Research Question
How might teachers’ use of children’s literature that accurately portrays individuals with exceptionalities/disabilities play a role in supporting an inclusive learning environment? The sub-questions that were considered include:

1) How do students with exceptionalities feel in general education classrooms and in resource segregated classroom?
2) What strategies do teachers use to make their classrooms more inclusive to all students, including those with exceptionalities?
3) How do teachers use children’s literature, and specifically children’s literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with exceptionalities, to teach and support inclusion in their general education classrooms or in a Special Education resource classroom?
4) What criteria do teachers use when selecting children’s literature to use with their students?
5) What challenges do teachers face when using children’s literature containing characters with disabilities to promote an inclusive classroom atmosphere?

Background Information

a) What grade(s) are you currently teaching?
b) If you are in a resource role, do you teach in a general education classroom or in resource room or in a support role? Please explain.
d) How long have you been teaching?
e) What educational background do you have regarding special education? (e.g., AQ in Spec. Ed? Other?)
f) Please tell me a little about your school and its focus on special education.
h) What experience do you have with students with exceptionalities?
i) (If a teacher in a general education classroom) Are there students with exceptionalities in your current classroom?
j) Are these students identified with an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?
k) (If a special education teacher) How many students are in your classroom and what are their exceptionalities? Are they with you full time or are they integrated into other classrooms for certain subjects?
m) Are these students with IEPs aware of their identifications?

Inclusion Strategies

1) What strategies do you use to promote an inclusive atmosphere in your classroom?
2) How do you choose strategies to meet the diverse needs of your students?
3) Regarding students with exceptionalities and their specific inclusivity, how would you explain different exceptionalities to your class? (Probe: When might you do this?)
Use of Literature/Teacher Beliefs

4) Have you used children’s literature that portrays students with exceptionalities/disabilities with your students, and if yes, how did it work?
5) How often might you use literature illustrating characters with disabilities in your classroom?
6) What are some examples of titles of such literature you have used that have worked well?
7) What criteria do you use when selecting this type of literature that contains characters with exceptionality?
8) Why might you use literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities? Do you believe it is beneficial in creating an inclusive classroom community? Why or why not?

Challenges

9) In your experience, what are the biggest challenges associated with integrating students’ disabilities in your classroom (or in general education classrooms)?
10) What challenges do you find in using appropriate literature with your students?

Supports

11) How might you or did you overcome these challenges?
12) How supports do you have or would you suggest?
13) What advice do you have for teacher candidates coming into the teaching profession about using children’s literature with accurate portrayals of individuals with disabilities? What other advice do you have about creating an inclusive classroom for individuals with disabilities?

Thank you for your time and input!
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: November 22, 2013

Dear __________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the use of children’s literature that accurately portrays individuals with exceptionalities/disabilities in inclusive classrooms for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My research supervisor and course instructor is Dr. Susan Schwartz. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor who is also my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Laura Wasserman
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Research Supervisor’s Name: Dr. Susan Schwartz
Email: susan.schwartz@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Laura Wasserman and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix C: Mary Ann Prater and Tina Tayor Dyches (2008) Top 25 Books with Characters with Disabilities

1) The ADDed Touch by Robyn Watson
2) Al Capone Does my Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko
3) The Alphabet War by Diane Burton Robb
4) The Bus People by Rachel Anderson
5) Crow Boy by Taro Yashima
6) The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time by Mark Haddon
7) Dad and Me in the Morning by Patricia Lakin
8) Flying Solo by Ralph Fletcher
9) Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick
10) The Handmade Alphabet by Laura Rankin
11) Hank Zipzer Series by Henry Winkler
12) Hooway for Wodney Wat by Helen Lester
13) Kissing Doorknobs by Terry Spencer Hesser
14) Knots on a Counting Rope by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault
15) The Giver, Gathering Blue and Messenger by Lois Lowy
16) Rules by Cynthia Lord
17) See the Ocean by Estelle Condria
18) Thank you, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco
19) True Confessions by Janet Tashjian
20) The View from Saturday by E.L. Konigsburg
21) The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin
22) Yours Truly, Shirley by Ann M. Martin
23) The Hard Life of Seymour E. Newton by Ann Bixby Herold
24) Welcome Home Jellybean by Marlene Fanta Shyer
25) Risk n’ Roses by Jan Slepian

Literature discussed in Interviews by participants

1. Don’t Laugh at Me by Steve Seskin
2. Be Good to Eddie Lee by Virgina Flemming
3. It’s Ok to be Different by Todd Parr
4. Martin Luther Big Words by Doreen Rappaport