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Representation or Tokenism? An illustrator's challenge to represent people with disabilities.

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Summary

This independent inquiry aims to address the issue of representation of people with disabilities in children's literature. It will look at historical representations of disability in fairy tales and the impact these representations have had on modern day children's literature. It will cover the challenges illustrators face when creating representative characters of people with disabilities and the importance of avoiding tokenistic gestures or creating stereotypical characters. This independent inquiry will analyse existing film and picture books that contain characters with disabilities, it will examine what can be learned from these examples to create more positive representations of people with disabilities.

Introduction

Over the past Twelve months it was reported that only one book in the top hundred bestsellers of children's literature referred to disability according to data from Nielsen Book research shared with the *Observer*. That research identified that 165 of 77,000 children's literature published had the words disability or disabled. They also researched statistics for children's literature published since 1898 and found just 708 books that contained these keywords in the descriptions (Ferguson, 2019). Representation and diversity seem to be buzz words of 2019, so, how is it that representation of disability is being left behind compared with representation of other areas of diversity?

I am a mother to three daughters, two of them have various issues which would class them as having a disability. I know from experience the frustrations of finding characters within children's literature that are like them, the best that can normally be found is a specially ordered book that revolves around the specific issues they face that aims to educate about that issue. The lack of representation makes me question the affect this can have on a person with disabilities' self worth and also the impact it has on non disabled children and their attitudes towards people with disabilities.

This independent inquiry aims to address the issue of representation of people with disabilities in children's literature. It will look at historical representations of disability in fairy tales and the impact these representations have had on modern day children's literature. It will cover the challenges illustrators face when creating representative characters of people with disabilities and the importance of avoiding tokenistic gestures or creating stereotypical characters. This independent inquiry will analyse existing adaptations of fairy tales in children's animated films and picture books that contain characters with

disabilities, it will examine what can be learned from these examples to create more positive representations of people with disabilities. Looking at how organisations such as the National health service conduct their approach of coproduction of services and literature with service users. Coproduction may help authors and illustrators when creating characters with disabilities, to create meaningful and authentic portrayals that are not only representative and inclusive towards people with disabilities but help shape positive attitudes towards them from non disabled people.

Chapter one: The need for representation

'The realist novels of the two centuries (18th and 19th) were based on the construction of the average citizen. The average citizen was nonheroic and middle class. But the average citizen was also linked with the concept of virtue.'

(Quayson, 2007, p19)

Disability is no stranger to being represented in children's literature. However widely those representations are either negative, pitiable or contorted with unrealistic ideologies.

Throughout history being able bodies has been depicted within fairy tales as an ideal state that can only be realised through a magical reality (Schmiesing, 2014 p18).

When we look at disabled characters in fairy tales, we can see them presented in the following roles:

- People with disabilities are characterised as the villain, someone to be feared and sneer at. Their physical impairments are used to emphasise their evilness.
- People with disabilities are pathetic and someone to be pitied.
- People with disabilities must be magically transformed into an able-bodied state. This is the only way they can live a fulfilled life and live their happy ever after.
- People with disabilities portrayed as a 'Super Crip' and put into positions of overachievers.

- People with disabilities are portrayed as childlike and incapable of having adult relationships.
- People with disabilities are often isolated away from disabled and non-disabled peers.

(Rubin and Watson, 1987, p60-62).

Fairy tales primarily existed to teach morals, in times when society was highly superstitious these stories were used as a tool to ensure people conformed to societies rules. In the 19th century in particular Christian faith was strong. 'Good health and able bodied-ness were associated with goodness, virtue and seen as a gift from God. This meant that illness and disability were willed by God as a trial or punishment.' (Schmiesing, 2014, p19).

Fairy tales have been retold the world over, adapted to reflect the times they are retold in to reinforce morals of those times. However, adaptations are rarely made to change to portrayal of the characters with a disability. As a society we have grown up with these telling's and retellings in books, taught in schools, in animations and so forth. We have become so conditioned to accept these impairments that make these characters who they are, that sometimes it is hard to recognise as being a misrepresentation of people with disabilities until it is highlighted. So, these misrepresentations become accepted, unquestioned and carry on being retold despite the negative implications it can have on disabled people. These misrepresentations could have a negative impact on how people with disabilities view themselves and also impact on how non disabled people view and treat them.

This chapter will focus on representations of characters who have a disability from Disney adaptations of fairy tales. It will cover the representations of the characters with disabilities and the impact these representations could have on the audience. Disney's retelling of the *Hunchback of Notre Dame* 1996, is an adaptation on Hugo's 1831 *Notre Dame de Paris*. Disability activists made requests for Disney to consult with the disabled community for an accurate representation and made requests to change the film's title. However, requests were not actioned. (Norden 2013).

Most movies have tended to isolate disabled characters from their able-bodied peers. This is reflected not only in the typical storylines of the films but also to a large extent in the ways the film makers have visualised the characters interacting in their environments (Norden, 1994, P20). We see this right from the onset with Quasimodo. He is confined to the Cathedral of Notre Dame, forbidden by Frollo to leave. Quasimodo develops an almost Stockholm syndrome effect where he believes Frollo has his best interests at heart but really Frollo has ostracized him because of his disability. In his isolated state he becomes friends with the Gargoyles and has made a model of the town, himself and the towns people where he fantasises about interactions with them. This isolated representation and childlike persona is exasperated when Quasimodo breaks Frollo's instructions and ventures to the festival of fools. Quasimodo becomes caught up in the festival and is crowned the king of fools and the ugliest man in Paris, then subjected to humiliation at the hands of the towns people and has to be rescued by Esmerelda.



Figure 1. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

Esmerelda is the beautiful Gypsy woman that Quasimodo finds himself falling in love with, she is a stark contrast to Quasimodo who is defined as ugly. Quasimodo who has been conditioned by Frollo even calls himself 'hideous and a monster'. His love for Esmerelda is perceived by all to be unachievable and Esmerelda falls in love with Phoebus who is the handsome Captain. The physical attributes of the characters within *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* support the argument put forward by Davis, Dickey and Stratford (1992) that non-disabled characters are always represented to be beautiful and popular and the image of perfection. (cited by Hodgkinson and Park (2017, p57).

Referring back to the aforementioned representations that are typically assigned to people with disabilities the character of Quasimodo can be identified within several of them. The only one he does not identify with is being perceived as a villain, as even with the 'Super Crip' definition, Quasimodo within the film is able to

fly around the bell towers with an almost superhuman ability which enables him to save Esmerelda.

This could send a message to the audience that it is appropriate for people with disabilities to be singled out and ostracized by physical and mental abuse. That this could be an extension of the film's producers who Norden confirmed (2013) were less than sympathetic to the people with the Kyphosis condition who requested and petitioned the name of the film to be changed. The impact this movie had on the audience view towards people with disability was quite profound. Within the United Kingdom alone this movie was linked to disability hate crimes against people with spinal deformities, with attacks against people occurring on 100 occasions after the release of the film (Norden, 2013).

Paul Darke (1993) author of '*Understanding cinematic representations of diversity, the disability studies reader*', concluded that where disabled characters are portrayed, they often seek revenge on the non-disabled. This allows the audience to perceive a disabled person as being bitter about their condition and seek to place blame and guilt upon non-disabled people. This concept is prevalent with the character of Captain Hook within Disney's 1953 adaptation of *Peter Pan*. An amputee with a hook as a prosthetic, he can think of nothing but revenge against Peter Pan, who in contrast to Hook is a young Heroic boy, who watches over Neverland keeping everyone safe from Hook.

Captain Hook's misdemeanours are a source of amusement for the audience throughout the story. He would likely to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder from losing his hand to the crocodile. The crocodile who also swallowed a

clock would make a ticking noise which was a trigger for Hook. It is a great source of amusement to Pan and therefore the audience when Pan torments Hook with ticking clocks that cause him great distress. This causes Hook to react and want revenge on Pan even more.



Figure 2. *Peter Pan*

Hook's fate at the end of the story, where he falls into the jaws of the crocodile that has tormented him through the story, is also seen as a humorous and justified end for the bitter revengeful pirate. Such representations influence children to believe that disabled people are to be laughed at. These representations can dismiss the issues that disabled people face (McGraile and Reigar, 2014). In the example of Captain Hook, the upset of losing a limb or suffering post traumatic stress. They can also be damaging to a disabled person's own sense of self as it depreciates their own position in terms of importance in comparison with non-disabled people.

Traditional fairy tales still employed within the 21st century focus on these past principles. Which in practise means children are reading content that promotes separation between non-disabled and disabled people (Agbaw 2011).

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter these attitudes towards disability come from past centuries. Whilst the representation of disabled people within the original literatures was representative of societies attitudes and beliefs during the times in which they were written, the problematic issue is that the representations are still being taught in a society where we are supposed to be addressing oppression towards minorities.

Greta (1986) identified in research that disability is represented to be pitiable and a burden to non-disabled people and society (cited by Hodkinson and Park, 2017, p61). Ableist ideologies of disability and lack of inclusion of disabled characters promotes the segregation of disabled people in society (Hodkinson and Park, 2017, p61). Despite the fact that Disney released both of these films 43 years apart, and in that time disability rights movements became more prominent particularly after the 1960s. Disney's attitudes towards disability representation within their fairy-tale adaptations are still largely representative of the original stories and have closely mirrored the way they were presented when they were first written. Rather than adapt the characters to be more representative and inclusive of the times the films were released, as the disability community were requesting. This attributes to the conclusion that these ableist attitudes from historical story telling have a much larger influence on modern day writing within children's literature.

Chapter two: The risk of tokenism

“Everything old is remixed until it is new again. This seems to be the defining trait of our current culture.”

(Michael, 2016)

The previous chapter discussed the historical influence of representation of people with disabilities within Disney’s adaptations of those fairy tales. This section will be focusing on the influence those historical representations have had on modern children’s picture books, and how tokenism has evolved within them due to a need for representation.

In contrasting opinion to the beliefs presented within the first chapter regarding the representation of people with disabilities in fairy tales, author Sally Gardener states that she believes the magic of fairy tales is that they give children power and that children can identify with any of the characters within the story not just the protagonist. They are designed to be an inspirational source which can attribute to the fact that able bodied people mainly only recognise the positive ideologies set out by the story rather than the negative representations set within them.

Looking back to the Hunchback of Notre Dame for example, the audience was intended to view it as a positive adaptation. Quasimodo is freed from his life in captivity and regardless of the fact that Esmerelda didn’t return his love, he was complicit in saving her life and the townspeople from Frollo’s attack on the city and

won the hearts of the townspeople who once ostracized him. This gives an insight to how these ableist representations can be overlooked especially when disguised as tales of overcoming adversities. When those who are telling the stories within children's literature have had no personal experience with ableism all they will possibly recollect from these tales is the positivity they felt as an audience member. The experiences can influence who they then want to be as story tellers for children's literature and can in turn use the same standards that they were presented with when they were children.

When writing and illustrating children's literature it is inevitable that adult content will be construed within. "Children's literature is literature that claims to be devoid of adult content that nevertheless lurks within it." (Hunt cited by Flynn, 2009, p97). Therefore, it is inevitable that the interpretations of the illustrators and authors within children's literature include their own bias within the stories they tell. However, these interpretations do not always come from a negative perspective as discussed within the first chapter. With the calls for more representative children's books, authors and illustrators are more mindful of creating diverse stories, and issues such as multiculturalism, gender, lgbqt and disability within children's literature are slowly being addressed.

Darkes (2004) asserted that merely promoting for more positive representation of disability as counterbalance to traditional representations is naïve. This is identified when we look at examples of picture books and can see tokenistic representations of diversity.

Tokenism by definition is the actions that are the result of pretending to give advantage to those groups in society who are often treated unfairly, in order to give the appearance of fairness.

In children's literature with regard to disability the example for this would be including a character in a wheelchair as the protagonist's best friend, just to say it ticks the box for disability. The issue surrounding tokenism is; it is diversity without inclusiveness and does little to actually address the problems faced by disabled people in respect to feeling represented. Tokenism allows the book creators to feel like they are being representative of people with disabilities. 'Inclusion is essential in order to begin the process of combating negative attitudes about disabilities (Crawford, 2016, P5).

This section will compare picture books that are available to purchase from the high street and look at representations of characters with disabilities either within the story or represented within the illustrations. It will explore how those stories address issues of representation and if they have taken into consideration inclusivity or are a tokenistic approach to representing disabled people. It will then discuss how these representations can impact on the audience.

The first picture book explored is *Franklin and Luna go to the moon* written by Jen Campbell, illustrated by Katie Harnett (2018). The summary of the book is: 'Luna and her best friend, Franklin the dragon love stories and want to visit all the places they've read about in books. Along the way, they meet many magical creatures but there is just one problem – they can't remember where dragon's live.' Within the text there is no mention of disability, so the focus on disability included in this story is in

the illustrations. Luna herself is an able-bodied girl. The book describes her best friend Franklin and says 'Franklin isn't like her other friends at all. He is larger he is Greener'



Figure 3. *Franklin and Luna go to the moon*

Presented in the illustration for this page is Luna with her friends, one of them is in a wheelchair and appears to be of Asian origin and another friend is black. This appears to be a tokenistic gesture on behalf of the illustrator and feels like an afterthought that the story needs some minorities to be illustrated to tick the box for diversity. It does nothing to be inclusive to a reader who may have disabilities as the nameless character is not featured in any other pages. The other characters are also presented behind Luna which gives the impression of less importance. Although this isn't a negative portrayal it is an empty gesture which serves no purpose to the plot.

It is uncommon for the character with a disability to fill the role of protagonist (Dyches and Prater, 2005: Kendrick, 2004; Matthew and Clow, 2007 cited by Crawford 201, p13).

Another book to be examined within this section is *Becky the Brave*, a story about Epilepsy written by Lauren Lears and illustrated by Gail Piazza. (2002).

Summary of the plot: 'Nothing seems to scare Sarah's big sister Becky, until having an epileptic seizure makes her reluctant to return to school, and so Sarah summons her own courage to explain the disease to the other students.'



Figure 4. *Becky the Brave*

Looking at the first page of this book we are introduced to Becky, through her sister Sarah. Depicted in the illustration are Sarah and Becky. Sarah is smiling and happy and Becky looks quite sad in comparison, although she is wrapping her arm protectively around her little sister.

The character of Becky is the protagonist but, in the sense, that the story is being observed from the perspective of her sister, which makes Becky's role passive. Becky is used to inspire her younger sister. Although this book was clearly designed to highlight the issues of epilepsy and in turn the effect it can have on siblings, the representation of Becky is quite negative. Whilst she is portrayed as protective towards her sister, she is written and illustrated quite sullenly and bitter about her condition, as she wishes to hide it from her friends. Her sister looks on her quite pitifully and makes the wish that she won't have a seizure at school which she then does. When this happens, Sarah is sad for her sister and Becky refuses to engage with her and refuses to go to school and pretends that she is ill, so she doesn't have to go. This makes Sarah upset as she doesn't want to go to school alone, Sarah is so angry about it she forgets to be afraid. This diminishes how Becky is feeling and the actual implications having epilepsy could have on a child as the story then revolves around how Sarah is feeling and how Sarah then becomes brave by talking about Becky's condition to Becky's classmates. Sarah does however show to Becky's classmates that Becky is more than her condition. The representation of disability within the story falls short on being truly inclusive. Becky's voice about her condition is taken away from her through the telling of the story and through Sarah talking to Becky's classmates. Sarah speaking for Becky is representative of the challenges people with disabilities face in real life. Often people with disabilities note that they feel invisible and that people would rather talk about them to a person accompanying them than to them directly. This story is quite metaphorical for the treatment people with disabilities face in real life.

Although these examples attempt to make strides to being representative, they miss the mark of being inclusive, and miss the opportunity to create meaningful depictions. Crawford attributes this to the fact that as a writer or illustrator without the perspective of a person with a disability it is presented in an outside looking in way. 'The majority of children's writers do not come from minority cultures or have direct experience with disability (Golos et al, 2012, cited by Crawford, 2018, p14). It is obvious to state however that not all children's books can feature a disabled character as the protagonist. Which poses the question are all representations of disabled people when they are not the protagonist, tokenistic gestures? Would it be better to leave out disabled characters from the background? Or at least is it some form of representation even if they are not the main character within the story? Whilst the answer to these questions may not be attainable it would be reasonable to state that including disabled characters in the background may only be perceived as non-tokenistic once there is a fair level of representation of disabled people featured within children's literature.

Chapter three: Finding a balance

‘Children’s books can be meaningful outlets that reflect cultural climate and powerful tools that shape new attitudes.’

(Crawford, 2016, P4)

Children’s books have been powerful voices for equality within movements for other minorities and although there is still a long way to go for equality in these movements there appears to be more advancement in terms of acceptance amongst younger generations. Where children’s literature has in the past been responsible for promoting negative stereotypes towards disability, it has the potential to influence the acceptance of disabilities in a wider society.

Beverley Brenna (2013) children’s author and Professor of Curriculum studies, specialising in literacy and children’s literature, states that the idea that negative stereotypes surrounding disability within children’s literature can be expelled and used for social change is an “alluring and provocative concept, but one must unpack stereotypes about disability within the texts themselves.” Brenna goes on to stipulate that the core to this should be the authenticity of the characters.

Picture books in particular are an important source to help develop the attitudes of children towards people with disabilities, as the sense of self and building self-esteem begin around the age of 3-5. Children of these ages can begin to be shaped by people they interact with, and messages around them towards a societal bias against minority groups. (Golos and Moses, 2011; Golos et al 2012 cited by Crawford 2016).

Using the information presented at the beginning of this chapter and previous chapters, this section will compare representations of disability within picture books that are examples of inclusivity. One such example is *Through the eyes of me* Written by John Roberts and illustrated by Hannah Rounding. The summary of this story: 'Welcome to the world of Kya. Recognising behaviour, appreciating thoughts and feelings, developing communication; this gentle description of four-year-old Kya's world will help everyone young and old, understand autism better.'

Jon Roberts wrote this story for his daughter Kya who has autism. He wrote it so that other people could understand or identify with the joys and challenges of having autism. The fact that it comes from a personal perspective but through the eyes of Kya enriches the story. Unlike the story of *Becky the Brave* as discussed in the last chapter, Kya has the voice in this story, and she is showing you her world. Although designed to educate about the quirks of autism, the fact that Kya is autistic isn't mentioned until the last page. It is quite a sweet, humorous but honest look at autism which is complimented by the use of illustrations and typography.



I love it when my daddy lifts me high in the air

and spins me around
and spins me around
and spins me around

It makes me feel so happy.

I love being tickled, especially when my
mummy blows raspberries on my belly.

Mummy says and that
my smile makes everyone happy

and that
my laughter is infectious

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Figure 5: *Through the eyes of me*

Kya is illustrated looking like any other four-year-old girl, the illustrations are energetic and give a great sense of emotion depending on the context which is enhanced by the typography as seen in the picture example to reinforce that sense of movement. This book is a mostly positive representation of a child with autism as the character Kya is authentic and the use of sharing positive humour with Kya gives a true insight into her character.

Individuals with disabilities can often be perceived as being limited with their sense of humour or being able to appreciate humour. 'Reading about characters with disabilities, who like their able-bodied peers, can appreciate and produce humour, can help children and adolescents to see individuals with disabilities as complete people.' (McGrail and Reigar, 2014). Although the argument could be made that even though the story is presented through Kya's eyes this is really a representation of Kya and her autism from her father's perspective as the author. One way he could have constructed the story from a person with autism's point of view, as he would

have been limited with his four year old perspective, would have been to coproduce the story with help from people who have autism, this would have made it truly representative. When he writes that Kya loves spinning on the spot this may be an assumption from a neurotypical perspective that because she spins on the spot often that she must enjoy doing this. Coproduction of this story with people with autism may have concluded that although people with autism may often spin a lot in order to sensory seek this doesn't mean it is an activity they enjoy.

Negotiating the topic of disabilities can often be a difficult thing, and whilst humour certainly helps make characters more identifiable it is also important to not play down the challenges people with disabilities may face. Picture books are often used as a tool for adults to be able to discuss sensitive topics with children, to help the child make sense of the situation. Books that address sensitive issues can help provide accurate information, normalise feelings, help build a dialect between child and caregiver, help to develop coping mechanisms, and help develop empathy and understanding (Perrin and Starr, 2000). Therefore when dealing with the serious issues surrounding characters with disabilities it is essential to avoid stereotyping and work towards making the character as authentic as possible.

Perfect Written by Nicola Davies and Illustrated by Cathy Fisher is one such book that addresses a more sensitive subject surrounding disability. The summary of this story is: 'Written by award-winning children's author Nicola Davies, and beautifully illustrated by Cathy Fisher *Perfect* opens up the subject of disability for young readers. It tells the story of a boy who struggles to accept his newborn sister, when she is not what he expected. But the swifts which swoop over his home help show him that she is truly perfect.'

This story like *Becky the Brave* is told from the eyes of a sibling, however this story is more authentic in its representation. With *Perfect*, the character with a disability is a baby so it is natural that the perspective would come from another character. The book is addressing the difficult issues siblings of children with disabilities face particularly with acceptance. This is particularly important as acceptance towards people with disabilities is essentially one of the major points of needing more books that are representative of people with disabilities. Nicola Davies takes you on that journey towards acceptance through the story. It validates that feelings of unacceptance are normal, but they need to be addressed. The use of the swifts within the story is cleverly orchestrated to help the boy develop empathy and acceptance towards his sister.

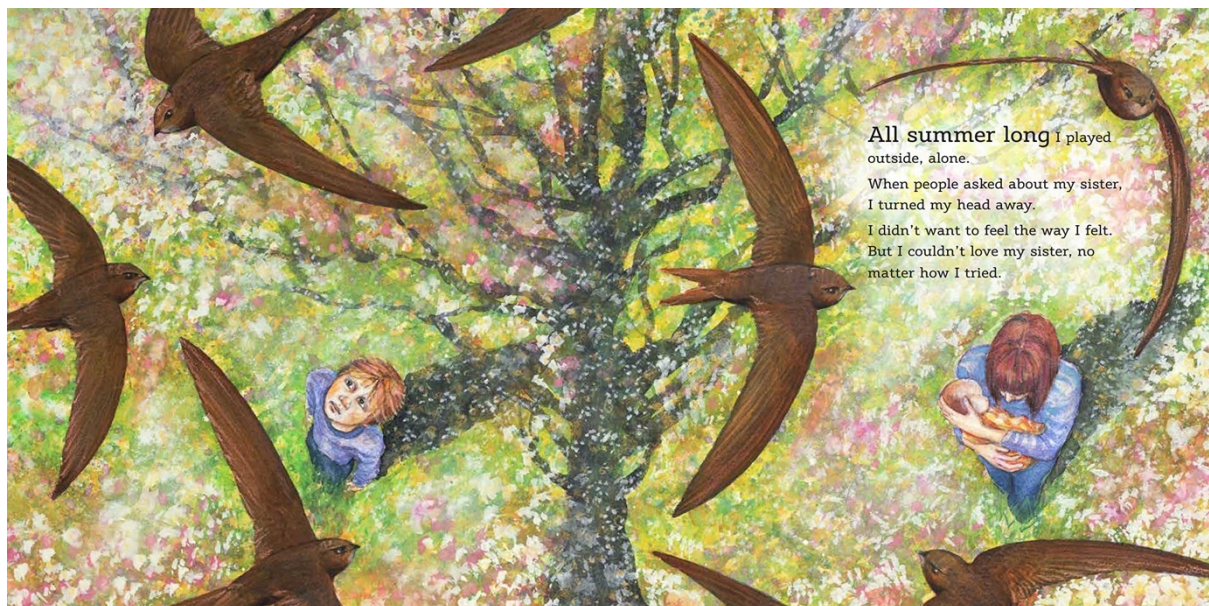


Figure 6: *Perfect*

The illustrations within the story do not depict anything of the disability but accentuate the emotion from the boy. The illustration pictured shows the mother

caring for the baby and the boy is standing separate to them, he is watching the swifts who are the birds that carry him and the reader through this journey of emotion and acceptance.

Both of these picture books address disability in a positive way, they avoid stereotyping the characters and address the issues surrounding disability in a sympathetic way. Particularly the emotional aspect, they approach their subject from entirely different angles, but highlight the issues and take the reader on a journey towards acceptance and understanding. From a contrasting point of view however, they are both books specifically about disability. Whilst this goes far with creating awareness and addressing a lack of representation, there is limited availability when attempting to find positive representations of characters with disabilities where the protagonist is a character with a disability, but the plot is not necessarily focused on the disability itself.

King for a Day, written by Rukhsana Khan and illustrated by Christiane Kromer, is one such example where the plot does not focus on the disability. The summary of the book is: Basant is here, with feasts and parties to celebrate the arrival of spring. But what Malik is looking forward to most is doing battle from the rooftop with Falcon, the special kite he has built for speed. Today is Malik's chance to be the best kite fighter, The King of Basant.'

This book is inclusive on many levels, it covers multiculturalism as well as disability in the form of the protagonist Malik. The book is mainly about one boy's aspirations to master a centuries old tradition and Malik happens to be a boy who uses a wheelchair. 'Characters with disabilities from diverse cultures are not

particularly prevalent in children's literature and books containing culturally diverse disabled characters often miss opportunities to create meaningful depictions of cultural experiences' (Crawford, 2016, p13). This is something *King for a Day* has presented successfully and is beautifully supported by the illustrations.



Figure 7: *King for a day*

To be overly critical the small issue for *King for a day*, is using the wheelchair for the portrayal of disabilities, this is slightly indicative as a tokenistic approach to representation by using the wheelchair to make it clear Malik has a disability which allows it to fall short of being inclusive towards other disabilities as disabled people are more than a representation of a wheelchair. There was a real opportunity within this book to push inclusivity even further by categorising the disability into something other than a wheelchair user. However, the portrayal of wheelchair users is still vital towards inclusivity in children's books. We don't need one book ticking all the boxes

for diversity, we need lots of books being inclusive and authentic in different areas showing the wide range of diversities we have in society.

David Badiel, children's author stated in an interview for *The Guardian* (2019) 'It is not a question of teaching children about the world, it is reflecting the real life experiences a child might have.' The best way about finding out about those experiences is to go to the people who are living them.

An example of an organisation that has to be able to communicate with and represent people of disabilities appropriately and will spend time and money investing on how to do this appropriately is the NHS. The NHS has to be able to interact with people from all walks of life and they have to do it without stereotyping, without presenting information negatively, with credibility and accuracy. The NHS publishes leaflets on all manner of conditions aimed at people living with those conditions and the people who may come across them. It would therefore be appropriate to look at how they do this affectively and to see what examples we can take from it that can then be translated into the world of children's literature.

Speaking with Sarah Hancock, speech and language therapist specialising in adults with learning disabilities, to ask how she produces information to services users and what is the standard procedure for the NHS she advises that the NHS use coproduction, which means service providers work with service users to produce a service or product that meets the needs of the service users. The NHS states on their website that the benefits of this include: Improvement in services because they are focused on using lived experiences rather than data, everyone is equal, you are likely to experience new perspectives, it's a productive and meaningful way of

working. It is built on the principle that the people who use a service are best placed to help design and improve it. If this is applied to children's literature, then people with disabilities would get a voice. Disney had this opportunity with *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and they dismissed it, leading to a negative representation of disability that caused distress to many people with disabilities.

Conclusion

The portrayal of characters within children's literature has 'extensive implications about the levels of understanding and acceptance within our society.' (Crawford, 2016). There is a great demand for more positive and authentic portrayals for disability representations within children's books, however supply is not meeting demand and progress in the area compared to other diverse areas, such as black, Asian and minority ethnic, is slow. The fear of causing offense, or somehow making it worse is most likely in part to blame however being left out or not represented at all and your existence being denied is a far worse fate (Matthew and Clow, 2007).

It would undoubtedly be far more empowering and authentic for representation of disabilities within children's literature to come from author's or illustrators who have personal experience of disabilities, but the numbers required to do that will never meet the demand needed to have a true impact on children's literature, so, responsibility of inclusivity should fall on us all.

Children's author Susie Day states that she heard by chance of a condition called hemiplegia that affects one child in one thousand. 'I thought that's a lot of kids for something I had never heard of.' And she set about writing a story about it. But fear struck her and was questioning whether she had it right or what if she represented it wrong and is it safer not to try? To combat this, she researched the condition and reached out to a hemiplegia Facebook support group to ask for advice and was put in touch with two consultants who share with her their personal experience with the condition. The result was a coproduced character 'Ryan Munro a Scottish ghost hunter, aged 12 who has hemiplegia and wears a splint on his arm

and leg.’ Ryan is obviously not representative of all people with hemiplegia as all people with hemiplegia are different.

When creating inclusive characters for children’s literature no matter how much research you conduct you will never be able to represent everyone, but it is important not to second guess yourself out of being inclusive altogether. The importance when creating the characters is to research appropriately be authentic in the portrayal and to stay away from stereotypes or negative portrayals such the ones discussed within this independent inquiry. Authentic portrayals of characters with disabilities shows what they can do rather than what they cannot do and presents the disability as part of who the character is not all of who they are. (McGrail and Riegar, 2015, p3).

In order to represent disability as an illustrator it is clear that research and coproduction are essential to a successful, positive portrayal of the person. Tokenistic gestures should be avoided by considering inclusivity throughout the creative process rather than as an afterthought as a superficial attempt at being diverse. Avoiding being representative as to not offend people if you get it wrong is not the solution to not getting it wrong and just adds to the issue of under representation. This does not mean that every single protagonist character that is created should be a person with a disability, just that a fair percentage should be, and consideration should be taken within the process of designing characters to see if there is an opportunity to be representative towards a specific type of disability. It would be impossible to be representative of all people all the time when creating diverse characters. Due to the statistical fact that there will always be less authors and illustrators than readers and not all of these authors and illustrators will have

personal experience with disabilities it lies with all of us within the industry to educate ourselves and make sure we are all taking responsibility to research, and be as inclusive as possible towards all minorities but particularly people with disabilities for this independent inquiry.

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