

Constructing impairment and disability in school reading schemes

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the cultural construction of disability detailed within school reading schemes. The study by the employment of proto-text analysis followed the 'reading journeys' that a four- and five-year-old child experienced during the course of one academic year. The study examined 61 reading books that contained 2199 illustrations, 100 photographs and 1006 pages of text. The major finding of the research is that the reading schemes contained a limited construction of disability and one that was contextualised within medical deficit and narrative prosthesis. The research concludes that school reading schemes are potentially acting as a Trojan horse to introduce a page thin hegemonic that inculcates young children into the systems of dominance and 'ableist' agendas which are seemingly replete in our society.

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Introduction

This research emerged after I became concerned about the contents of the school reading books that were brought home by my eldest son during his first year in school. This concern centred upon the belief that the scheme books we read together did not contain images of disability nor stories in which disabled people were represented. This lack of representation has been observed elsewhere, for example, in school textbooks (Hodkinson 2007a) and in the electronic media employed in classrooms (Hodkinson 2012a). The subjective feeling, then, was that school reading schemes might be another example of how the 'strong and proud history' of disability and disabled people had been diminished and devalued by an 'overcoding machine' which had acted to smooth out degrees of deviance 'to the normalised individualised form' (Kuppers 2003, 6; Hodkinson 2014).

Given the paucity of academic consideration offered to the explanation of cultural constructions of disability in pedagogical materials, this paper seeks to make a distinct scholarly contribution by broadening the research which has examined disability in children's literature to that emplaced in school reading scheme texts. In mobilising this vista of literature, the research seeks to explore what, if any, notions of normality might have influenced the selection of text and images found within a sample of scheme books presented to my children by their class teachers. The research by the application of proto-text analysis demonstrates how disability in children's reading schemes is extremely limited and that which is presented is seemingly formulated within a construct of medical deficit and negative stereotype. In attempting to provide an interpretation of this construction of disability, the theories of oculanormativity and narrative prosthesis theories are employed to highlight how disability is apparently mediated by societal constructions of normality and ableism. The paper suggests that school reading schemes are inculcating young children into the systems of dominance and 'ableist' agendas which are seemingly replete in our society. Before

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this analysis commences, a brief contextual detail is provided as to development and employment of the school reading scheme.

55 *School reading schemes*

The employment of reading schemes has in England, and elsewhere, a history both within the school and home environ. Their origins may be traced back to the 1930s America and the publishing of the Dick and Jane books. In England, scheme books gained popularity in the 1940s when O' Donnel and Munro anglicised American books to formulate the Janet and John reading scheme. During the 60 1960s, Munro added to this genre by introducing the now famous Peter and Jane key words books. This series of 36 books taught children to read by the employment of a sight-reading and repetition strategy of what are known as the common words.

The significance of these texts should not be underestimated. For example, the publishers of the Janet and John series claim that these books are 'iconic', a 'source of our cultural heritage' and 'that 70% of British Adults' learnt to read using their scheme. Additionally, the Peter and Jane books have sold over 80 million copies worldwide (see www.ladybird.co.uk). Despite their popularity, these schemes became subject to critique as they reflected only the culture of white, middle-class and male-dominated families. Although subsequently updated to be more culturally representative, 70 these schemes fell out of favour during the 1980s and were replaced most notably by the Oxford Reading Tree and the Ginn 360 series. A website that publicises these schemes notes that these texts are filled with 'much loved characters' and contain 'real stories about real people' which 'give children the very best start' to their learning to read journey. Despite these schemes having a mechanical approach, the development of the 'real books approach' and recently the introduction of systematic phonics, they remain an important part of schools' 'learning to read' strategies (EYE 2014). 75 Indeed, in the school the two children attended, educational professionals listened to the children read the scheme books twice a week and parents were encouraged to 'hear' their children read such books on a weekly basis.

80 **The 'picture of disability' in children's books**

'Everything we read constitutes us,
Makes us who we are ...'
skin, Mem, Fox
(see Ullah, Ali, and Naz 2014)

'Reading is the sole means by which we slip,
involuntarily, often helplessly, into another's
voice, another's soul.' Joyce Carol Oates.¹

My conceptual starting point in this analysis is as for the authors of the quotes above. This is that children's literature provides a powerful medium through which children make sense of both the world they live in and their cultural heritage (Ullah, Ali, and Naz 2014). In addition, the analysis of McCabe et al. (2011) suggests that this corpus of texts delivers messages about what is 'normal', 90 what is 'beautiful and hideous', what is 'right and wrong' and importantly 'what is attainable'.

A review of the literature demonstrates that whilst there has been research into gender and race (see Weitzman et al., 1977; Pirofski 2005; Ullah, Ali, and Naz 2014), there has been a distinct lack of a systematic academic analysis of the picture of disability in reading scheme books. Analysing the more general body of work within children's literature suggests that many studies have utilised elite 95 samples and this research is mainly located within the American context. The next section of the paper explores this research to ascertain the corporeal reality of disability that exists in such texts so as to provide a starting point to the analysis of the reading scheme books.

Historically, research has argued that authors of children's literature have employed disabled characters for literacy symbolism or indeed to aid the moral development of other more significant characters in the storyline (Dyches and Prater 2000). More recently, Carlise (1988) in a study of texts from 100 the 1940s to the 1980s although distinguishing an increased portrayal of disabled characters

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suggests that children's texts still offered mainly negative messages about the lives of people with disabilities (Sanders, 2000).

Harril et al. (1993) examined 45 randomly selected texts to compare the portrayal of disability. They found that after 1978, the incidents of negative stereotypes and employment of non-discriminatory language decreased. Additionally, the realistic depiction of disabled people as 'appropriate role models' within the stories also increased after this time (Prater 2003).

Ayala (1999) studied 59 fiction and non-fiction children's books that were published between 1974 and 1996 that specifically portrayed disabled characters. This study's finding detailed that only 20% of the disabled people portrayed what the author determined were 'realistic characters'. This study revealed that in the main disabled characters mirrored the prevailing 'demographic trends' and negative stereotypes that were replete in society.

Prater (1999) examined 68 books published between 1965 and 1968 in which characters with learning difficulties were emplaced. This research demonstrated that only 19% employed 'images of disability' and few of the texts told stories from the point of view of a person with disabilities. A notable finding of this research was that disability, schooling and education were rarely depicted together. In 2001, Dyches et al. examined 12 books published in 1997 and 1998 which focussed on learning disabilities including those with a specific focus on autism. The findings detail that the characterisation of disability was inconsistent, that disabled characters were not well integrated into society and that disabled people were subject to support rather than being those who offered support to others. However, despite these findings it is suggested that the 'picture' of disability was improving as disabled characters were more independent and included in society than in previous studies. In 2000 and 2003, Prater again studied the specific representation of learning disabilities finding that the incidence of such characters ranged from 4% to 9% of the total characters portrayed. The continuing trend of more positive portrayal was again evidenced by Prater (2003). This research, which examine 90 texts that included characters with learning disabilities, revealed that the majority of these characters were portrayed as 'dynamic' in the storyline and almost all of the stories were told from the point of view of the disabled character. Continuing this trend, Dyches et al. (2009) analysed 41 children books that had been entered for the Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award and had been published between 2004 and 2007. The results again suggest that an increasing number of children's books were employing developmental disabilities in storylines and that such characterisations were becoming more positive and inclusionary.

Despite this more positive work, it is interesting to note the study of Hughes (2006) and Beckett et al. (2010). Hughes' study examined the representation of visual impairment in six picture books designed for children aged 12 or under. Hughes's analysis demonstrated that some of these texts continued to demonstrate stereotypical messages about disability, not least that with love and kindness a visual impairment might be cured. Hughes' research concluded that teachers still need to be much more selective as to which non-fiction books they incorporate into their classroom resources. Beckett et al.'s (2010) research demonstrates that in the twenty-first century representations of disability and impairment seemingly had changed little to those dominating the preceding century. Beckett's findings confirming those of Reiser and Mason (1992) denote that discriminatory language and negative stereotypes continue to be folded into representations of disability appearing in children's literature.

Problematising the image of disability in children's literature

This review of the literature indicates that despite a rise in the number of books that include representations of disabled people (Ayala 1999), it is still the case that there is a lack of children's texts that include disabled characters or stories about disability (Hodkinson 2007, 2012b; Leicester 2007). It would appear, then, that disabled people have come to be regarded as being different, set apart from the rest of society (Davidson, Woodill, and Bredberg 1994) as a 'dominant narrative' of the

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'other's experience' has seemingly been woven into the social narrative of the books that young children read (Beckett and Buckner 2012).

Leicester comments **that** such absence carries the message that disabled people are of less interest and value than other members of society (see Beckett, 2010). Of concern is that disability is not only under-represented in this literature but its cultural construction is malformed (Hodkinson 2013), presenting mainly negative messages about the lives of disabled people (Saunders 2000). Biklen and Bogdana (1977) analysis suggests **that** such negative messages are conceptualised within 10 stereotypes; that disabled people are 'pitiable and pathetic', 'an object of violence', 'sinister and evil', 'curio or exotica', 'an object of ridicule', 'super cripple', 'their own worse enemy', 'a burden', 'asexual' and 'incapable of fully participating in everyday life'. Solis (2004) details **that** these stereotypes are deeply engrained in our cultural heritage. For example, that 'disabled people are menacing and dangerous' (Crow, 1998) such as Captain Hook. Or, that disabled people are innocent and saintly, for example, the pitiable crutch of Tiny Tim and that they are an 'inspiration to all of us' such as with Helen Keller and Douglas Bader (Crow 1990; Solis 2004).

It is important to realise here that throughout the history of Western culture, 'visual renderings and textual explanations' (Solis 2004) of physical disability, such as a hook, a hunched back, a wooden leg and an eye patch have been employed as a metaphor for evil and depravity (Connor and Bejoian 2007). In contrast, 'goodness' is articulated by angel like figures with long flowing (often blonde) locks and smiling faces. Such representations have, it is argued, created a 'corporeal reality' (Solis 2004) that presents disabled people in two ways. These being, that they are 'defeated, angry people requiring help' or 'never say die' people whose impairments are a challenge to make them go out and conquer the world (Crow 1990). Connor and Bejoian (2007) believe that such presentations tell us a great deal about society and its values.

Whatever may be said of the 'purposes and effects' of children books, the review of the literature reveals that whilst research has considered the picture of gender and race no equivalent research has been conducted that examines the cultural construction of disability in reading scheme books.

Research questions

The review identified questions meriting further investigation. These being

- do reading scheme books reflect the diversity inherent in our society;
- are people with disabilities visible within this genre of text; and,
- what is the 'picture' of disability constructed within reading scheme books?

Methodology

The research examined the representation of disability and disabled people within reading schemes that were shared with two children in one school in the north of England. The texts selected for analysis therefore were those that teachers had chosen to employ to aid the development of reading of a four- and five-year-old child. These books contained an average of 12 pages, were dominated by illustrations and normally contained three to four simple sentences on each page. Exceptions to this were five books that were encountered by the older child at the end of Year One. These books, normally 48 pages in length, whilst containing illustrations were more textually based containing around 9 or 10 more complex sentences per page. In total, 61 books sourced by the teachers from several reading schemes, notably the Ginn 360 and Oxford Tree Schemes, were analysed which included 1006 pages of text, 2199 illustrations and 100 photographs.

The research employed proto-text analysis to an analysis of the scheme books (Bourdillion 1992). Within such an analytic framework content, textual and discourse analysis is simultaneously employed to uncover explicit and implicit messages conveyed within the sample media (Johnsen

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1993). In uncovering the books' subcutaneous layer (Johnsen 1993), the aim of the research was to examine whether consciously or unconsciously they promoted prejudices or stereotypical ideas about disability or disabled people (Fritzsche 1992). The initial macro analysis was based upon the framework developed by Hodkinson (2007) which was informed by the work of Dyches, Prater, and Cramer (2001). This meant that each scheme book was examined page by page with any pictures, illustrations or texts which related to disability or disabled people being demarcated by the researcher (Commeyras and Alvermann 1996; Ninnes 2002). The illustration and textual examples were then allocated to the specific categories of disability, race and gender by the researcher. This initial categorisation of the data was shared with a colleague and the categories refined. This revision observed the erasure of the category of disability for characters wearing eyeglasses who did not display another indicator of impairment. This was because whilst a minor visual impairment might be assumed by the wearing of glasses, a disability might not. In total, 12 overarching categories were employed that covered a wide range of physical and learning disabilities as well as indicating the prevalence of race and gender.

The second phase, the microanalysis, examined the demarcated sections of text using linguistic analysis (Crawford 2004). Here, linguistic forms within the text such as the lexicon, agency and action, voice, verbs and adjectives (Ninnes 2002) were analysed to reveal any 'hidden assumptions' about disability and disabled people (Crawford 2004, 21). During this phase, a frequency analysis was also conducted; simple counting of the discrete sections examined how frequently disability, disabled people or impairments were mentioned. Finally, an examination of the images within the scheme books was undertaken. This involved a simple tallying of the people, categorised by race, disability, impairment and gender (Johnsen 1993).

In summary, this research explored and explained and in phenomenological terms gained a first-hand description of the image of disability uncovered by two young children in the reading scheme books they encountered in their first years in school. From the outset, this explorative research did not aim to impose, find truths or indeed to attempt to prove something right or wrong. An attempt was made merely to interpret this reality and to help to understand this human experience (Chalhoub, Hodkinson and Ververi 2014).

Results

The analysis of the data revealed a lack of material relating to disability. For example, in the study only two books contained any textual reference to disability. In the first, a short story related to a person with visual impairments and a second employed the metaphor of a pirate with a visual impairment to contextualised the 'baddies' in the narrative. This lack of data adds to a developing literature base (see Hodkinson 2007, 2012a), suggesting that the pedagogical material presented to children lacks of a 'positive narrative' or realistic image of disability.

A major finding of the research was the virtual absence of an image of disabled people within the reading scheme books commonly presented to primary school children. Although the image of disability portrayed within the scheme books was extremely limited, an analysis of the 16 images discovered provided distinctive data.

Table 1. Analysis of illustrations.

Gender	Total	%	Race	Total	%	Disability	Total	%
Total	2199		Total	355	16.14	Total	16	0.73
Total male	1321	60.07	Total male	202	9.16	Total male	15	0.68
Adult male	732	33.29	Adult Male	92	4.18	Adult male	15	0.68
Boy	589	26.75	Boy	110	5.00	Boy	0	0
Total female	878	39.93	Total female	153	6.96	Total female	1	0.05
Adult female	351	15.96	Adult female	27	1.23	Adult female	0	0
Girl	527	23.97	Girl	126	6.73	Girl	1	0.05

Table 2. Analysis of photographs.

Gender	Total	%	Race	Total	%	Disability	Total	%
Total	100		Total	17	17	Total	0	0
Total male	44	44	Total male	9	9	Total male	0	0
Adult male	35	35	Adult Male	0	0	Adult male	0	0
Boy	19	19	Boy	9	9	Boy	0	0
Total female	56	56	Total female	8	8	Total female	0	0
Adult female	39	39	Adult female	1	1	Adult female	0	0
Girl	17	17	Girl	7	7	Girl	0	0

Analysis of the images

The images within the sample media are noteworthy in several respects (see Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 1 and 2). In terms of gender, 60% of the illustrations were of males and 40% females. In respect of the photographs, 56% represented females and 44% males. An independent sample t-test indicated that there was a significant difference in terms of males represented in the illustrations (see Table 3). An analysis of 'race' determined that 16.14% of the illustrations and 17% of the images in the photographs represented people from a minority ethnic community. Table 3 denotes that there was a significant difference in terms of the representation of minority ethnic males and females in the illustrations ($p < .01$) but not in the photographs. There was also a significant difference in terms of the representation of minority ethnic males and females in the illustrations but not in the photographs. Furthermore, it is of interest to note that within the illustrations 51% represented children and within the photographs it was 36%.

In terms of the total number of characterisation portrayed within the texts, only 0.66% of the images represented disabled people. An independent sample t-test indicated that in respect of the illustrations and photographs that there were significant differences in representation between disabled people and non-disabled people in both the illustrations and the photographs (see Table 3). Within this subset, there was significance over representation of males and no images of disability and 'race' were observed. The most commonly portrayed picture was that of visual impairment which was rendered through the employment of the image of pirate. Of concern was that no images were discernable that represented positive images of disability. A major finding from the study confirming that of Hodkinson (2007, 2012a) and Prater (1999) is that in the wealth of school-orientated images that were analysed such as playgrounds, classrooms,

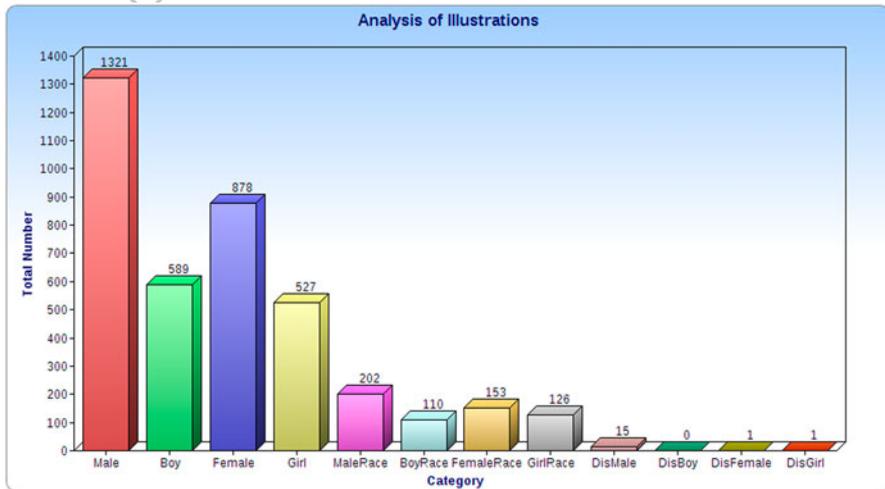


Figure 1. Analysis of illustrations.

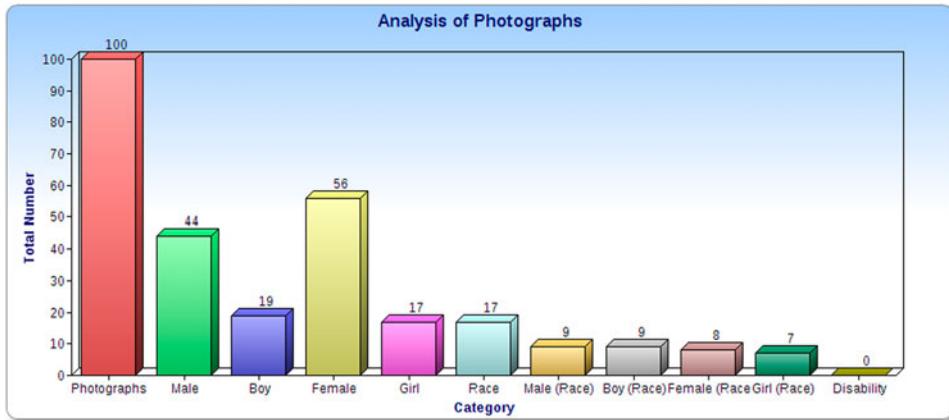


Figure 2. Analysis of photographs.

swimming lessons and school sports days, no picture of disability was observable. The findings of the study highlight that the most prevalent image the school children are introduced to is a white, male, non-disabled person. It would appear then that these reading scheme books were perhaps based upon 'unmitigated and manufactured truths' (Shapiro 1999, 4) rather than a representative portrayal of the distinctiveness of human life.

Linguistic analysis and discussion

In spite of the rather limited sample size, it is of interest to note the contents of two of the reading scheme books. In the first, the reader is introduced to a story of 'The Blind Man'.

Context

This story, encapsulated in just 68 words from a text published in 1987, observes a child struggling to find their way through the streets of a town because of a dense obscuring fog. When the boy

Table 3. Illustrations independent t tests.

Analysis	t	Df	sig	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval - lower	95% Confidence interval - higher
<i>Illustrations</i>							
Male -female	1.99	120	0.48	7.26	3.63	0.69	14.46
Male - race male	5.93	120	0.00	18.34	3.09	12.22	24.47
Female - race female	5.42	120	0.00	11.86	2.19	7.55	16.22
Male - disabled male	5.92	120	0.00	18.47	3.12	12.30	24.64
Female - disabled female	7.09	120	0.00	14.38	2.03	10.37	18.39
<i>Photographs</i>							
Male -female	-.287	120	0.75	-0.20	0.68	-1.55	1.16
Male - race male	1.25	120	0.21	0.58	0.46	-0.33	1.48
Female - race female	1.48	120	0.14	0.79	0.53	-0.27	1.84
Male - disabled male	1.63	120	0.11	0.72	0.44	-0.15	1.60
Female - disabled female	1.76	120	0.08	0.92	0.52	-0.12	1.60

becomes lost, a figure representing a man, who is dressed in a long black overcoat, a black trilby hat, dark glasses and a long white cane enters to help the boy. The man takes the boy's hand and leads the boy home. At the end of the story, the boy remarks, 'You could see in the fog, but I couldn't'. The man replies, 'I am blind, you see'.

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Analysis

This story focuses upon the construction of a figure that seemingly has enhanced abilities because he can 'see' in the fog. The story's central motif is though problematic, not least, because of the representation of visual impairment, the application of the lexicon of 'seeing', but also in its engagement of normative language. For example, it is argued that employment of the signifier 'blind' enfolds 'moral and ethical implications' into the core of texts as 'blind' has distinct etymological, medical and cultural graduations (Davis 1995, 5). It is of interest here perhaps to note that 'The Blind Man' is a recurrent theme in Western literature, for example, in works by D. H. Lawrence and Bertolt Brecht. Analysing this, 'lexicon of impairment' reveals blind as an 'epistemological diminishment', in that, it 'bears no intrinsic relation to visual impairment' (Bolt 2014, 16). In Derridean terms, 'blind' is perhaps a signifier of 'faux départ' which drifting through cultural graduations and supplementations has formed into a mask of its former self. To be precise, only 5% or so of people registered as 'blind' have no ability to perceive differentials in light (Bolt 2014). The question here is, is this story's character blind or a person whose 'sight' includes aspects of vision? Perhaps, the character's dark glasses enable us to assume that he is unable to perceive light and dark. Another reading here, however, might also reasonably assume that hypersensitivity to light requires the dark glasses. A deeper analysis of this character suggests that his construction relies on a metanarrative that, as Bolt (2014) reminds us, perpetuates negative stereotypes. Bolt (2014, 21) accounts in what is a detailed, incisive and forensic examination of the etymology of this terminology that blind as an adjective, adjectival definition and in its synonyms presents 'an image of someone who is unprepared, unable to judge or act rationally and someone who is confused'. This analysis leads Bolt to contend that negative implications are woven into the fabric of this signifier and that 'the very term blind ... contains a tacit nod to the sighted and thus perpetuates, [what Bolt defines as], ocularnormative logic grounded in the normalcy of the sighted'.

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Whatever may be said about the etymology and operation of this signifier, another issue is how it renders to the character 'magical talents and achievements' (Bolt 2014, 97). This notion of compensatory or miraculous powers is often employed in the depiction of people with visual impairments (Jernigan 1974). Perhaps, one might suggest that these constructions of visual impairment are superior to others, such as 'Blind Pew' in *Treasure Island*, Mr Magoo or the notion of the 'groping blind', 'the blind flower girl' or the 'blind beggar man', replete in Western literature, who represent the helpless, hapless or indeed the downright sinister (Stuen 2006). Whilst one could perhaps observe compensatory powers as a positive representation, others detail that accentuating these 'powers' is problematic (Jernigan 1974; Bolt 2014). For Jernigan (1974, 1), emphasising compensatory capabilities 'removes the blind person at a stroke of the pen from the realm of the normal, the ordinary, everyday world of plain people and places him in a limbo of abnormality'.

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My analysis though is simpler perhaps than Jernigan. I would question the premise that visual impairment engenders a greater ability to navigate in foggy conditions at all. First, visual impairments are better understood in that some people rely on perceptions of light and dark, or hard and soft edges to navigate cityscapes (Dias 2013). Fog has the propensity to alter 'allocentric and egocentric frames' of reference (Simonnet et al. 2009) and perspectives in terms of oncoming vehicles, people and sounds by its ability to scatter light particles and muffle high-frequency sound waves (Dumont et al. n.d.). Fog like other weather conditions such as snow or heavy rain acts to blur edges, obstacles and faces and leads to the common perception that it deadens sound (Gabrielson 2006). Second, accepting the 'ocularnormative notion' that people with visual impairments have heightened auditory acuity, and indeed in some cases are trained to interpret auditory cues, perhaps enables this

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character to navigate better than the boy. Perhaps, his confidence is heightened through the ability to pick up auditory cues in the environment with more efficacy than the boy. However, as stated earlier auditory cues are themselves affected by the weather. The question remains, why continually represent people as having compensatory powers and why are children inculcated into such factual inaccuracies? The final words though should go to the central character 'The Blind Man' who concludes the story, 'I am blind, you see'. The irony in this statement is so overwhelming that further analysis is not needed nor warranted.

On the image of the pirate

Context

The second piece of text published in 2005 and entitled 'The Masked Cleaning Ladies' presents the story of three individuals defined as 'dirty looking' and 'dangerous pirates'. Their leader, who wears an eye patch, attempts to steal the royal treasure. These pirates threaten the king with walking the plank if he fails to acquiesce to their requests. In the story, the pirates are continually ridiculed, fail to meet their primary objective and end up dressed as 'cleaning ladies' working for the king after falling into a bath and having their dirt scrubbed away. They are worried that the courtiers will take photographs of such cleanliness and distribute such to all and sundry. The story ends with the king unsurprisingly stating, 'You are no good as pirates'.

Analysis

Disability here, then, was constructed upon those supposed to be 'sinister and evil'. However, these pirates could not get this characterisation right. Instead, they were located within the text more as 'pitiable and pathetic' people and 'objects of ridicule'. This representation correlates strongly with Biklen and Bogdana's (1977) analysis of the general media's categorisation of disability and specifically with representations detailed in other work on electronic media in schools (see Hodkinson 2012a). To move the disability/pirate metaphor further, although not along a plank, for this is misrepresentation of pirate culture (Kuhn 2010), another of Biklen and Bogdana's categorisation is aptly represented in Stevenson's classic portrayal of the pirate in *Treasure Island*. Here, Long John Silver is portrayed as being courageous despite his impairments. Interestingly though, like disability, pirates too have had a 'bad press' (Kuhn 2010). Note, for example, this early piece of misrepresentation, 'being possessed of a devil's fury, ripped open one of the prisoners with his cutlass, tore the living heart out of his body, gnawed at it and then hurled it in the face of one of the others' Alexander Exquemelin in *The Buccaneers of America 1678* (Kuhn 2010). Interestingly, disability during this period was no more common amongst pirates than the general population and it was pirates who set up some of the first charities for disabilities (Kuhn 2010; Woodward, 2007). This picture stands at some distance from the image of pirates constructed by today's society (Reiser 2006).

The employment of disability here then is perhaps more 'a metaphorical signifier' and example of what Mitchel and Synder name as 'narrative prosthesis' (Mitchell and Snyder 2001, 48). As they state, this phrase 'is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representation power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight'. In this respect, a portrayal of disability relying upon the pirate perhaps might be read as a form of disabilism leading to the 'abnormalisation' of the cultural image of disabled people.

Summary

This analysis demonstrates that people with disabilities are not represented, to any significant extent, in the reading scheme books that young children employ. In addition, when disabled characters are utilised the focus tends to be on their impairments (Biklen and Bogdana 1977). Garland Thomson and Stoddard-Holmes (2005, 73) suggest that such usage of disability is a 'cultural imagination' where society renders people with 'fixed notions' and binary identities (sight/unsighted and dis/abled). Here, then, these scheme books perhaps acted as a societal 'hall of mirrors' reflecting back in

images slightly larger or smaller than life the stable stereotypical images replete in society (Jernigan 1974). These books, then, failed to inculcate children into the real lives of individuals with disabilities. People cope with real feelings, real frustrations in real-life situations on a daily basis (Moore 1984). The question I forward here then is how might we start to tackle 'hate crime', inclusion and stereotypical attitudes when pupils are introduced to such cultural constructions?

Discussion

An important finding of this research is the almost invisibility of disability in the scheme books. Creany, Couch, and Caropreso (1993, 5) would argue that this invisibility of disabilities has important consequences. First, they argue that children who do not observe their own life in the books they read will feel that their life is not important enough to merit re-telling. Second, children who belong to the dominant groups in society will receive a distorted view of what the world is really like. For Solis (2004), children's literature upholds societal conceptions of disability and normalcy as authentic and indisputable knowledge. Crow (1990) suggests that the corollary of such cultural misinformation is that many children only have this malformed knowledge base to draw on in their interactions with disabled people.

Other researchers suggest that this malformed 'picture of disability' reveals only a temporal Zeitgeist in which children's literature reveals the power structures and dominance that are replete in society (Hodkinson 2007; 2012b; 2013). As Williams (1961) accounts, most media contain a hidden structure of interest and selective traditions which disenfranchises some groups by promoting the dominant perspectives of other more powerful groups. Foster (1999) believes such 'selective traditions' of knowledge continue to ensure the control of society by the dominant groups in that it validates an official sanitised knowledge base. Whatever may be said about children's literature, and the power structures contained there within, the findings detailed above in terms of disability and others which have analysed the picture of race and ethnicity (see Pirofski 2005), sexuality and gender (see Weitzman et al. 1977; Ullah, Ali, and Naz 2014) suggest that there is 'no such thing as objective knowledge or politically neutral books for children' (Ullah, Ali, and Naz 2014, 138). For some writers, the consequences of this 'selective tradition' are clear this is that beliefs systems develop as a result of the negative stereotyping of disabled people.

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The undermining of this thought processes

The mediating role of children's literature in the above researches might solely be contextualised as one of the promotions of a social construction of disability based upon inexact scholarship, omission and imbalanced information (David 2001). Some researchers contend that this leads pupils to the formulation of negative attitudes towards the other and the segregation and isolation of disabled people. Deleuzian's analysis (1987, 60) here would render the 'forms of content' observed in children's literature as 'alloplastic' rather than 'homoplastic'. Thus, such texts are able to bring about modifications in the real; the lives of those with an impairment. I believe that such analysis is flawed. This is because it is formulated upon simplistic and contrived notions of the learner. To exemplify, whilst one can perhaps accept, to some degree, that the modus operandi of children's literature is the cultural transmission of sanitised societal values, it is difficult to accept that the learner is always passive in the assimilation of the 'social hieroglyph' (Stray, 1994, 1). Therefore, 'what is read does indeed influence the reader' (Zimet 1976, 10) children's literature might only provide an 'alloplastic veneer' as there is a 'light year difference' between simply reading a text and finding 'out how people actually respond to it' (Kell-Byrne 1984, 196). Central to this form of thinking then is that the learner is not passive but is an 'active, creative and dynamic' person who interacts proactively with texts 'in the process of meaning making' (Taxel 1989, 35). If the role of children's literature is as straightjacket to cultural transmission of 'ableism', we must also acknowledge that other factors mediate the process of meaning making. For example, Luke, De Castell, and Luke (1989, 241)

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relates the 'school text is always the object of teacher mediation' and that some 'teachers make children aware of ... the cultural geography ...' (David 2001, 140). In Latour's terms (2011, p. 22), then children's books might not exist entirely as 'Factish gods', practitioners might not allow knowledge to pass into action without a belief 'in the difference between construction and reality, immanence and transcendence'. Therefore, as Apple (1992, 10) relates 'we cannot assume what is in the text is actually taught. Nor, can we assume what is actually taught is learnt'. It seems more cautious to suggest, therefore, that the exact role of this literature in socialisation becomes difficult to establish (Podeh 2005).

In the thesis, I propose that, however, these books have a much simpler role. The pages of these reading scheme books again reveal the Zeitgeist of society; a sight of a past and present landscape embedded in culturally informed practices (Hodkinson 2013). A landscape which when deciphered reveals the active formulation of identity and of power, of dominance and of 'othering'. The revelatory nature of deciphering the cipher is that it focuses surveillance back onto the dominant groups' sense of self-providing mirror to their bigotry. In this form of complex, power relationships are revealed through concepts such as domination/inequality/othering and colonisation. As with colonisation these books perhaps reveal terrains of dialectic and praxis where authors have power to 'narrate or block narratives' (Said 1993, xiii. For a fuller account of this colonising power see Hodkinson 2013). Here, then, as Larson (2000, 40) succinctly accounts, 'the power to represent the nation is already the power to dominate it'. In these ontological envelopes, authors' and their publishers' ideological perspectives control the 'system of representing, as well as speaking for everything in the domain' (Said 1993, 13). The power of this children's literature then is that it is able to manage heterogeneity through 'imposition, restriction, regulation and repression' (Quayson 2000, 112). The pages of the reading scheme book to me therefore reveal the 'mental attitude' of the authors' 'inability to conceive of any alternative', thus revealing the formulation and control of a disabling demographic. Within this terrain, authors may be observed as a repressive force who occlude the heterogeneity of society recasting the strong and positive image of disability within an institutional homogeneity of normalisation and 'ableism' (Quayson 2000).

Conclusion

The findings of the study denote that the representation of disability within the school reading scheme books is limited in the extreme. Furthermore, the construct of disability observed 'is infected with the notion of medical deficit' and built upon the foundation of narrative prosthesis. Clough (2005, 79) reminds us that school curricula have always been a means of exclusion and it would appear that reading schemes, like electronic media and textbooks beforehand, are seemingly fulfilling a similar exclusionary role. In this educational space, the authors and their publishers had a unique opportunity to trouble 'post-modern local narratives' and to change them by presenting 'a new emancipatory democratic space' (Žižek 2009, 33). These reading scheme texts though were predicated only on extant Lacanian Master-Signifier relationship contextualised in 'ground rules grounded only in themselves' (Žižek 2009, 22). This lack of the troubling of what was known empowered a phenomenological reduction and thereby seemingly mobilised the, 'homogenising logic of the institution' to '(re)produce a [false] homogeneity of demographic' (Golberg 2000, 73), thus invalidating these texts as a site of emancipatory possibilities.

Within inclusive education, pedagogical materials should perhaps seek to open up and re-frame systems of oppression with children's literature, textbooks, electronic materials and school reading schemes being re-framed within the principles of human rights, democracy, equity and social justice. Here, then, the pedagogical materials ultimate aim would be to develop schools where all children could participate and be treated equally. In this formulation, education would become a moral concept necessitating the expression of the values of self-fulfilment, self-determination and equality. In their work authors, publishers and teachers would all realise that relations of dominance exist in society and that obstacles to effective education are embedded in simple everyday habits (Slee 2001). It is in this light that the research concludes that school reading schemes are potentially

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acting as a Trojan horse to introduce a page thin hegemonic that inculcates young children into the systems of dominance and 'ableist' agendas which are seemingly replete in our society. Žižek (2009, 436) might ask here 'how do these new conditions compel us to transform and reinvent the very notion of freedom, autonomy and ethical responsibility?' The answer to this is that the reading scheme books observed in this research do not help in the transformation to a more socially responsible society. They seemingly only continue to perpetuate the image of a homogeneous, normalised and 'ableist' society.

Notes

1. See http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3524.Joyce_Carol_Oates
2. Whilst data on gender and race are reported here, there is no space to develop any significant analysis. They are reported, therefore, as purely an illustrative category that depicts the frequency of representation.

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