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Characters with Disabilities in Contemporary Children's Novels:

Portraits of Three Authors in a Frame of Canadian Texts

by

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*I dedicate this work to my wonderful husband Dwayne
and our sons: Wilson, Eric, and Connor.
Thank you for being my foundation.*

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored influences on three Canadian authors who present characters with disabilities in children's fiction. Portraits of these authors are framed by a discussion of contemporary Canadian children's novels, offering curriculum ideas within the framework of critical literacy. The research questions were: What patterns in the depictions of characters with disabilities appear in the context of Canadian novels, published since 1995, for children and young adults? What motivates and informs selected contemporary children's authors' construction of fictional characters with disabilities?

Portraiture was used as a variation on case study research. Methods for data collection and analysis included semi-structured interviews, personal narratives, and content analysis regarding three author portraits, including a self-portrait; content analysis was also applied to fifty children's novels. Bakhtin's conceptualization of the literary chronotope was utilized as a lens to explore aspects of time and space 'internal' and 'external' to these texts, and further delineated by aspects of time, social context, and place—three categories borrowed from the field of narrative inquiry.

Research on classic fiction illuminates particular patterns and trends regarding authors' portrayals of characters with disabilities. This dissertation has identified and explored contemporary trends. While disability figured in all of the

children's novels in the study sample, ethnicity was strikingly absent, as were books for junior readers ages eight to eleven. The inquiry utilized Dresang's Radical Change theory to identify the landscape on which books about characters with disabilities reside, supporting the metaphorical conceptualization of the radical changes in children's literature as a 'rhizome'.

The resonance of what has informed authors, in addition to the exploration of the children's books in this study, offers perspectives that impact critical literacy classroom approaches delineated within Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys' four dimensions framework: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on socio-political issues, and taking action and promoting social justice. The latter dimension, while not accomplished through reading the texts themselves, may be approached through attention to author influences. The implications of the study relate to curriculum development as well as promote further research in Education, English Literature, and Disability Studies. An annotated bibliography is included.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Early in the 2003 school year, I was a Saskatchewan educator working on a Ministry of Education advisory committee to support the development of a new Grades 7 - 9 English Language Arts curriculum. My self-defined role on this committee was to insure that the curriculum guide contained references to fiction presenting characters with special needs, as I perceived that in previous curriculum recommendations such depictions were remarkably absent. As I began my search for young adult fiction novels, I was surprised to discover a dearth of available titles.

Coincidentally, at that time, I was also writing an early draft of my own young adult novel, *Wild Orchid* (Brenna, 2005). My curriculum work, and my recent learning in the field of special education, propelled the decision to include characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome in my depiction of Taylor Jane, the protagonist in *Wild Orchid*.

As I began to ponder the importance of children with special needs seeing elements specific to their lives reflected in fiction, I wondered how often students with disabilities are reflected on the school landscape at all in terms of 'stories to live by' (Orr, 2005). Rather than books about characters with disabilities singularly defining the reading material of students with special needs, I believe these texts should complement a variety of literacy resources for all students as part of considerations of 'universal design' (Orkwis & McLane, 1998). I agree

with Galda (1998), who states that books allow readers to “transform words-on-a-page into emotional experiences that function as mirrors and windows into our lives and the lives of others” (p. 1). Such a transaction supports readers in making connections with book characters whose differences may be unique in the context of the readers’ lives, yet whose similarities with the readers transcend exceptionalities. “At best,” says Galda, “reading literature can allow us to understand how alike we all are, even in our differences” (p. 1).

Research on classic fiction has uncovered common patterns including the trend that characters with disabilities are either ‘cured or killed’ within the course of the story, a tendency that suggests authors have not been able to envision a happy future for someone with a disability. The lessons readers have been learning from classic fiction include the following common themes: there is nothing good about being disabled; disability is a punishment for bad behaviour; and, people who have disabilities can never be accepted by society (Keith, 2001). In considering contemporary Canadian children’s literature featuring characters with disabilities, I questioned whether past patterns are continued and wondered what new patterns are emerging.

Educators need access to books about characters with disabilities, as these texts are necessary in reflecting the range of students’ lived and potential experiences. Motivation to include these books may come from multiple sources; it was my hope that an exploration of authorial influences in the creation of characters with disabilities would open a space for resonance as teachers consider the counterstories writers are telling, reflecting further upon the importance of

these stories for readers. In addition to exploring the value of diverse characterizations in student texts, educators require a framework that will support student analysis of texts, and understandings about critical literacy provide such a support.

What books are available, why they should be offered, and how they should be used, are three questions irrevocably linked. Through the wide scope of my study presented within a critical literacy framework—exploring contemporary Canadian novels that portray characters with disabilities as well as the influences on three of their authors—I anticipate that the research at hand will establish fertile ground for further research as well as for curriculum development.

Research Questions and Methodology

A closer examination of the depiction of characters with disabilities in fiction for children and young adults led me to the formulation of the two research questions that are central to this study. These questions are:

1. What patterns in the depictions of characters with disabilities appear in the context of Canadian novels, published since 1995, for children and young adults?
2. What motivates and informs selected contemporary children's authors' construction of fictional characters with disabilities?

I selected portraiture as the methodology for this study because “portraitists write to inform and inspire readers” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997, p. 10). My intention for this dissertation was to use written ‘portraits’ of three Canadian authors to foreground scholarly information that

might assist and influence classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, literature specialists, special educators, and researchers in Disability Studies. I have thus attempted to draw interdisciplinary interests into a dissertation initially conceived as a support for educators.

Through including literature about characters with disabilities as a frame for the portraiture, it was my intent to explore perspectives on critical literacy that have not previously been acknowledged. Greene (1995) states that the arts encourage the cultivation of “multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same” (p. 16), and while the arts have been utilized to explore gender and cultural differences in children’s texts, an evolution acknowledged by curriculum, conceptualizations of disability in literature have not received similar treatment. I hope this dissertation, through its focus on literary presentation, will add to scholarly conversation as well as practical application with regard to considerations of the portrayals of characters with disabilities in children’s texts and the inclusion of fiction about characters with disabilities in educational settings.

Emaline, the young heroine in Porter’s (2005) verse novel *The Crazy Man*, has seen the town’s reaction to Angus, her mother’s new field hand, who has been stigmatized due to a stay in the local mental hospital. Even Mum has warned Em not to go near him. Yet experiences with Angus teach Em alternative perspectives, and, just as she herself is agonizingly stereotyped because of a physical injury, she realizes that Angus is more complex than people make him out to be:

*I couldn't decide if I should go to the trouble
to hobble all the way around
to the front porch to avoid him,
or if I should try to just slide past him
there on the back step.
Mum called again, looking down
out of the window over the sink.
So I started toward the back step. I got closer
to the crazy man.
My hands gripped hard
on the handles of my crutches.
My good foot landed in front of the step
where he sat eating off our blue plate
with the chip on one side.
All of a sudden he put his plate down
on the ground, and he bent over
and tied up my shoelace. (pp. 49 – 50)*

Through the discussion in the rest of this chapter, I have outlined the need for this study and its theoretical framework in ‘disability as a social construction’. The research questions are further illuminated in terms of their origin as well as the qualitative methodology through which they are addressed. At the end of this chapter, language and terminology is identified in relationship to particular definitions and conventions I have adopted for this dissertation.

Need for the Study

The Evolution of ‘Disability’

The conceptualization of ‘disability’ has evolved in a similar manner to other social constructions such as gender and ethnicity (Asch & Fine, 1988) yet

while disability is “as fundamental an aspect of human diversity as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality” it is “rarely acknowledged as such” (Couser, 2006, p. 399). “Disability,” say Jaeger and Bowman (2005), “is ordinary. Yet disability is rarely considered as a societal issue in a thoughtful and humane manner” (p. ix). “Despite the prevalence of disability in this society, disabled persons tend to be invisible” (Asch & Fine, 1988, p. 1). Addressing null curriculum—what schools “do *not teach*” (Eisner, 2002, p. 97) in terms of disability— has been one way to highlight disability issues that have been silent and that have mirrored a pattern in early critical theorizing where “people of Color and women” were “ignored and marginalized” (Willis et al., 2008).

One treatment absent from classic literature involves the presentation of a character with a disability from multiple perspectives. In her contemporary children’s book *The Crazy Man*, Porter (2005) demonstrates how unidimensional viewpoints have clouded Emaline’s mother’s vision with regard to Angus:

*The man said Angus
was the best gardener they ever had.
Mum looked at the man. Then
she looked at Angus. “Oh,” she said,
like she’d never thought about
Angus knowing how to do anything
except be crazy.*(p. 83)

Reviews of The Child That Books Built

An example of overtly negative attitudes toward people with disabilities can be found in relation to Spufford’s (2002) text *The Child that Books Built*.

Although Spufford hints at the possible ill effects of his addiction to books, and outlines the manner in which, as a child, he used books to block out difficult life experiences, reviewers have fastened onto the idea that this book is a testimony to “the saving graces of children’s books” (Mercier, 2003, p. 490) and “the power of reading” (Cassel, 2002, p. 176). Says Cart (2002): “This brilliantly insightful and elegantly written life is essential reading for anyone who loves books and their power to help us” (p. 22).

Yet what Spufford (2002) outlines in his mix of memoir and analysis is a childhood spent guiltily turning away from a younger sister with a chronic illness, a stance succeeded by a “tuned-out adulthood” (p. 11). Spufford reports using books as an escape, however ‘the child that books built’ became the man whose narrow views are reiterated in the following anecdote that follows a description of the vulnerability Spufford saw when he looked at his sister Bridget:

And ever since, I’ve hated vulnerable people. Bridget’s mind worked just fine, until the very end, but for some reason it isn’t the physically handicapped who remind me of her. People in wheelchairs seem reassuringly solid, somehow—anchored by gravity. It’s the slow people, the learning-disabled, the much-euphemised-fucked-of-wit I find unbearable, locked in their innocence, tottering through a world they don’t understand in the misplaced confidence that it’s safe. I remember seeing, on a bus in London a couple of years ago, a girl of about twenty, not with Down’s Syndrome features, but with her head too small in proportion to her body, and a horribly hopeful smile...and the sight of her hurt my heart,

and made my eyes prickle. I would have taken away what afflicted her if I could, but since I couldn't I hated her for what she made me feel, and I wished she was dead, or at any rate safely segregated somewhere where the sight of her didn't burrow at the long-buried roots in me of an intolerable pity...(pp. 15 – 16)

Individuals and their beliefs are the products of larger societies, and while there is a tendency to blame individuals for their viewpoints, alternate reactions involve interrogating life circumstances or examining the larger societal context for underlying influences (Ruitenbergh, 2004). While Spufford's (2002) statements are particularly horrifying in their accusation that people with disabilities actively cause discomfort, and for this reason should be killed or institutionalized, the lack of reader-response to these views and the uncontested praise Spufford has received for *The Child that Books Built* is particularly illuminative.

Stories are connected to people's lives through "emotional links" that produce resonance; "such emotional linking is not simply a passive reflex; it is an active construction, a placement of one story next to another" (Conle, 1996, p. 307) implying an important role for educators in a process that does not necessarily occur independently. In a study regarding the effects of texts designed to alter stereotypical attitudes of readers, social context emerged as a factor directly related to information acquisition (Yzerbyt & Carnaghi, 2008). In terms of the reviews of Spufford's work, it is interesting that none have deconstructed his discussion with respect to disability themes—a sign that his statements about disability have been interpreted as unremarkable.

It is important that educators develop classroom contexts within which to support the development of critical literacy, necessary in a society where goals for respecting diversity are ongoing. Kliever (1998) discusses the representation of students with disabilities as “cultural burdens,” a factor in their “long history of segregation from the wider school community” and outlines the “narrow and rigid interpretations of who and what constitutes community usefulness” (p. 9). Through segregation, people with disabilities have been made invisible and, in Spufford’s (2002) view, such invisibility through segregation is desirable. The silence in response to Spufford’s view of people with disabilities in the context of *The Child that Books Built* is a striking example of an ongoing societal problem, offering support to Freire’s (1998) indictment: “It is the irresistible preference to reject differences” (p. 71).

From the marginalization of people with special needs as ‘less than status quo,’ towards full acceptance of people with differences, disability’s evolution is ongoing. Human rights’ laws provide important guiding principles regarding the acceptance of all people, but in many aspects of community life—the workplace, living environments, schools—people with disabilities continue to struggle for equal access and respect. Yet disability as a fundamental human experience is missing from our critical consciousness (S. L. Snyder, Brueggemann and Garland-Thomson, 2002). Stories, and the context in which these stories are provided, can provide an important medium for change, drawing disability to the fore alongside other aspects of human diversity.

The Power of Stories

In her book *The Kindness of Children*, Paley (1999) tells a story about Teddy, a child with special needs with whom she worked in the context of a group of London schoolchildren. In the anecdote, Teddy's classmates welcome him wholeheartedly into their imaginary play, even above the reluctance of a teacher to let him participate, and he blossoms from the opportunity. Paley relates 'the Teddy story' for other children who offer, in return, connected tales of impulsive kindness. Then Paley retells Teddy's story in her own personal narrative, connecting its themes to her elderly mother whose experiences as a frightened immigrant child illuminate the beauty of finding a friend. Paley's narrative inquiry shows how stories can affect personal identity, in the composing, the telling, the retelling, and the listening. I, too, have been powerfully affected by stories, and I believe that through the framework of stories—as listeners, storytellers, authors, students, and educators— we truly can change each other and the world.

The social milieu of schools has been identified as beneficial to all students through inclusionary considerations although there is ongoing debate inside and outside school contexts regarding the education of students with special needs, and inclusion is less accepted in practice than in principle (Winzer, 2000). While educators have gained understandings of the value of diversity through working with student populations, other members of society may carry even narrower views about disability and human potential. Such views continue to

be roadblocks to the project of inclusion, where the goal is to respectfully involve everyone in all aspects of school and community (Stainback, 2000).

Past attitudes and practices affect contemporary life in the way that history shapes, informs, and transforms current events. The politics of literary representation (Said, 1978) have been addressed through an examination of the depiction of particular ‘differences’ within and among people portrayed in books, beginning with race, gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality, and most recently including ‘disability’ as “another culture-bound, physically justified difference to consider” in terms of “the conventions of representation” (R. G. Thomson, 1997, p. 5). Related to this dissertation is a body of work criticizing the narrow and stereotypical depiction of characters with disabilities in traditional literature (L. J. Davis, 2006a; Hays, 1971; Herndl, 1993; Keith, 2001; Kent, 1987; Klages, 1999; Garland-Thomson, 2006; Gorham, 1982; Little, 1987; Mitchell & S. L. Snyder, 2000; Robertson, 1992) as well as in other media (D. Biklen, 1987; Dolmage, 2008; Hevey, 2006; Longmore, 1987; Norden, 1994; Riley, 2005; Wood, 1979). Such representation “informs the identity—and often the fate—of real people with extraordinary bodies” (R. G. Thomson, 1997, p. 15).

As Kent (1988) confides, the lack of appropriate fictional heroines in her youth heightened apprehensions about the future. “In books, it seemed, the only way a woman could be fulfilled was through the love of a man; and the only women worthy of that love were lithe and lovely, unblemished, physically perfect” (p. 90). Klages (1999) identifies how popular fictional discourses “constructed the social meanings of blindness which determined public attitudes

toward blind people” (pp 7 - 8) just as Luce-Kapler (2004) discusses stories that highlight the social constraints of particular eras. Minaki (2009) cites Jean Little as an author whose “fiction featuring disability represented the beginning of an understanding that disability is not the kiss of death” and reports being an avid reader of Little’s fiction: “unlike the other (able-bodied) students around me, I had my own specific reasons for reading Little’s work with gusto...with the voracious appetite of someone ‘looking for herself’ in the pages of fiction” (p. 12).

Rather than advocating for censorship of texts, this study focuses on the ‘why,’ the ‘what,’ and the ‘how’ of classroom practice, concentrating on exploring particular contemporary novels and the authors who created them, implying that using books about characters with disabilities supports a critical literacy classroom approach. It is important to make the distinction that criticizing a book is not censorship (Rudman, 1995). Students who are introduced to the agency of dislodging and resignifying texts (Ruitenber, 2004) will be better equipped to ‘read the word and the world’ (Freire, 1983, 1991; Freire & Macedo, 1987)—a desirable component of critical educational pedagogy. A consideration of representation as “re-presentation” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 76) also relates to critical literacy and foregrounds the importance of applying critical questions to the fiction teachers and students explore.

It is thus my goal to assist educators in finding and using books for the purpose of developing “the imaginative capacity that allows us also to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with

ours” (Greene, 1995, p. 31) in a “live, aware, reflective transaction” (Greene, p. 30) on a contemporary societal landscape where “we seem evermore to lack the qualities of empathy, the desire for collaboration and cooperation and negotiation, or the magnanimity of spirit to engage with the other as a member of our community or even our species” (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2005, p. 157). Such pedagogy addresses concerns regarding the importance of attention to text production and interpretation (Fairclough, 1992) and reacts to the observation that while the serious academic study of children’s literature has become a rapidly expanding field, such academic study has rarely pursued disability as a topic of interest (Keith, 2001).

In Gilmore’s (1995) junior novel *A Friend Like Zilla*, Uncle Chad is disdainful towards Nobby’s new friend Zilla, an older girl with developmental disabilities. Yet Nobby values the relationship: “*It was sort of neat how we fit together. Like puzzle bits. Zilla could do things I couldn’t, like cook and find clams and berries and stuff. But I could read and draw and think up ideas*” (p. 37). Just as she takes the time to understand Zilla, Nobby begins to understand her uncle, who has social disabilities of his own. In a similar way, readers can explore the viewpoints of Zilla, Nobby, and Uncle Chad, as well as their own personal viewpoints regarding a conceptualization of difference in the context of their own lives.

Theoretical Framework: Disability as a Social Construction

It is important to note here that the employment of the term ‘social construction’ in the context of this dissertation is indicative of my belief that the depiction of characters with disabilities arises as a product of our particular society, corresponding to Crossley’s (2005) definition that a “relatively straightforward use of the term ‘social construction’ occurs in those instances where we wish to indicate that some part of the social world...is better explained in social rather than biological or (individual) psychological terms...” and “does not imply that everything is a social construct” (pp. 296-297).

Such usage of ‘social construction’ relates to ideas about cultural, historical, and social influences on writing where one can see language as a site where discursive struggles take place (Luce-Kapler, 2004). This use of ‘social construction’ also links to theories of the conceptualization of race and gender and how such constructions relate to disability theories where a distinction is made between “ ‘disability,’ a bodily configuration, and ‘handicap,’ a set of social relations or meanings assigned to a particular bodily configuration” (Klages, 1999, p 2). Social constructionist theories of the body demonstrate how “dominant ideas, attitudes, and customs of a society influence the perception of bodies” (Linton, 2006, p. 174).

Attention to curriculum with regard to disability can invite the inclusion of topics on which we have been silent and draw in groups who have previously been unengaged. Within the 50 contemporary books included in my study sample, I noted striking changes from the patterns described in research on classic texts.

Patterns in the novels of the study sample are further described in Chapter Four; display of these patterns is attributed to Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of the chronotope as a lens through which aspects of time and space within the children's novels were explored.

The term 'disability,' used to signify "a physical or psychological condition considered to have predominantly medical significance" is "an arbitrary designation" (Linton, 2006, p. 162). This identification of the flexibility surrounding the labelling of disability corresponds with definitions of disability as a social construction alongside gender, sexuality, and race (Asch & Fine, 1988; Mitchell & S. L. Snyder, 2000; Sherry, 2008). Priestly's (2001) statements that "the principal factors shaping disabling experiences reside not within the body but within the wider society" yet "disability also involves embodied experiences and expressions of agency" (p. 242) remind us that disability may occur both in the individual body, and as cultural interpretations of the body's interaction with the world. "If we think of disability as located in societal barriers, not in individuals, then disability must be seen as a matter of social justice" (M. Davidson, 2006, p. 126).

Interpretations of diagnoses based on the medical model of 'normal' almost always signal "ignorance, confusion, lack, absence, and ineptitude"; this is evidenced in the manner in which "ableist metaphors" rampantly slip into everyday speech and scholarly discourse (May & Ferri, 2008, p. 117). Such metaphors of disability, including the use of 'upstanding' for admirable and 'looked down upon' for rejected, are used because disability is an abstract

concept, “not necessarily a ‘scientific’ or ‘natural’ truth” (Dolmage, 2008, p. 105), and because “Western society places a premium on wealth, youth, physical strength, and attractiveness” (Rubin, 1988, p. ix).

Disability was once regarded very differently from the way it is currently perceived. A social process of ‘disabling’ arrived with industrialization, replacing the concept of “ideal”—a construct dating back to the 17th century—with the concept of “normal” (L. J. Davis, 2006a, p. 4). Rather than moving towards perfection through approximating a particular ‘essence’ or ‘quality,’ respecting the potential diversity of humankind and agreeing that the ‘ideal’ could never be attained, the word ‘normal’ sharply emphasizes dualistic categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ Brueggemann and Lupo (2008, p. ix) cite Adorno in noting that there can only be ‘normal’ as long as there is ‘abnormal.’

While disability is as ordinary and fundamental an aspect of human diversity as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, it is rarely acknowledged as a societal issue (Couser, 2006; Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). The goal of revisionary projects is to open and participate in aspects of culture that have historically been denied (Said, 2005). Such is the goal of disability studies, where schooling for democracy and critical citizenship addresses “questions of Otherness generally fashioned in the discourse of multicultural education, which in its varied forms and approaches generally fails to conceptualize issues of race and ethnicity as part of the wider discourse of power and powerlessness” (Giroux, 2005, p. 89).

The need to develop awareness of a lack of understanding with regard to people with disabilities is an important concept (May & Ferri, 2008) as it connects

to topics that have previously been absent from school curricula. Canadian author Jean Little reports that, as a young girl bullied at school, “I was gradually learning that if you were different, nothing good about you mattered” (Little, 1987, p. 36). In high school, a teacher of Home Economics reacted to Little’s visual impairment: “You should be in an institution. I’m paid to teach normal students; not abnormal ones” (Little, p. 150). An emphasis on difference leading to segregation of people with disabilities was a common trait of Canadian education prior to the 1970s, when inclusionary practices became more common (Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy, & Heath, 2001). Yet, “disability is not simply about diversity. It is also about commonality—not a commonality of embodied experiences but a commonality of purpose, in the struggle for a more inclusive society” (Priestly, 2001, p. 240). Schools, with their current interests in supporting ‘universal design’ frameworks for learning (Orkwis & McLane, 1998), are working towards embracing both commonality and diversity.

Literary texts have “rarely appeared to offer disabled characters in developed, ‘positive portraits’” (Mitchell & S. L. Snyder, 2000, pp. 15 – 16), creating “constructed oppression” in relation to disability imagery in photographic books (Hevey, 2006, p. 367) where oppression describes acts that prevent people from “being more fully human” (Freire, 1983, p. 42). “In our modern society, after many years of social progress about disabled people’s rights to be accepted...one might expect a more enlightened approach to the treatment of disability in cultural works” (Keith, 2001, p. 249). While the novel form is, as L. J. Davis (2006a) indicates, a “proliferator of ideology...intricately connected with

concepts of the norm” (p. 15), it may be possible to change the impact of classroom literature by altering the way images and stories are presented, offering the potential for disability to teach that life can be reinvented (Riley, 2005). Literature can be a vehicle that addresses diversity (Rueda, 1998), fueled by a critical literacy pedagogy that moves social justice ideals into classroom study.

Study Design: Qualitative Research

A number of assumptions are embedded within qualitative research. These include the idea that reality is “constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6), and thus a qualitative research focus is concerned with the experience of the researcher as well as the participants. Other assumptions involve the apparent role of the researcher in collecting and analyzing data, the necessity of fieldwork, the employment of inductive research strategies, and the expectation that the product of qualitative research will be a rich description from which readers may make abstract connections to the universal (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

I have chosen qualitative methodology to address the research questions in this study as these questions lend themselves to the above assumptions. Any answers to the questions will be partial, informed by assumptions about “local narratives, situated truth, and shifting selves” (B. Davis, 2004, p. 109). I believe that “the arts function powerfully in establishing and confirming human community” (Le Guin, 2004, pp. 229 – 230) and thus books about disability used as resources within a diverse curriculum should not be taught as a discreet unit, or “ghettoized as ‘disability literature’” (L. J. Davis, 2006b, p. xviii). Instead, books

about characters with disabilities should be situated within a context of writers, readers, and other texts. It is my hope that a study of authorial influences may add to the limited studies on writers of imaginative works (Hawryluk, 1995; Meyer & O’Riordan, 1984) and foreground influences on writers that become, in turn, influences on readers.

Within a qualitative framework, I have chosen the technique of ‘portraiture’ to offer glimpses into the authorial craft at work behind the depictions of characters with disabilities. Cast by Merriam (1998) as a variation on case study methodology, I have subscribed to Lightfoot’s (1983) use of written portraits to “embrace many of the descriptive, aesthetic, and experiential dimensions” combining science and art, a union also seen in relation to fieldwork (Wolcott, 1995). Written portraits, according to Lightfoot, are concerned with composition and design as well as description, depicting “motion and stopped time, history, and anticipated future” (p. 6). As with Lightfoot’s work, I am not “creating holistic case studies that would capture multi-dimensional contexts and intersecting processes,” and I, too, am interested in uncovering “implicit values” (Lightfoot, p. 13), in my case those that guide particular authors’ decision making when it comes to depicting characters with disabilities.

The portraits of two authors, as well as a self-portrait, are developed with attention to the landscape of children’s books, analyzing contemporary Canadian texts that contain characters with disabilities and acknowledging patterns in traditional books. In addition to an exploration of patterns and themes in contemporary children’s novels, an annotated bibliography is provided that

includes ‘read-ons’ in a framework adapted from McLeish (1990) linking particular books to others in circulation. The influences on three authors, and an examination of children’s books, are explored within a framework of critical literacy, reflecting aspects of teacher, learner, milieu, and subject matter that are important as ‘curriculum commonplaces’ (Schwab, 1978)—elements of curriculum that must be considered as part of curriculum development. Critical literacy is offered as an instrumental aspect of curriculum that “foregrounds the intellectual autonomy of students by incorporating open-mindedness and inquiry that come from letting traditions debate with each other under the rubric that we learn more about ourselves by learning about others” (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2005, p. 164).

Language and Terminology

Definition of ‘Social Justice’

While ‘social justice’ has been described as difficult to define in definitive terms (Bull, 2008; Sturman, 1997), within this dissertation ‘social justice’ refers to a consideration of how dominant values and beliefs privilege the status quo and ignore populations that have been marginalized on the basis of ‘differences’ such as culture, social class, gender, religion, or ability, the goal of this consideration being equity (North, 2006). Educational equity, in this view, is not distributive equality, but rather a condition where justice is defined by matching the appropriateness of resources and treatment to the needs of the persons involved (Gordon, 1999). Equal education within such a social justice perspective does not mean each student receives the same program, but rather that students have equal

access to optimal learning opportunities. Social justice is “intricately linked not just to individual life chances but to the experiences of different societal groups and the fact that not all groups have been able to share equally in the benefits of education” (Bull, 2008, p. xiii).

Such a view of equity implies action, and ‘taking action’ is considered a key element of both social justice and critical literacy as it relates to empowerment. ‘Taking action and promoting social justice’ is “often perceived as the definition of critical literacy—yet one cannot take informed action against oppression or promote social justice without expanded understandings and perspectives gained from the other three dimensions” involving disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on socio-political issues (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002. p. 383 – 384).

Definition of ‘Disability’

In terms of a working definition of the word ‘disability’ in this work, I have adapted ideas from Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy, and Heath (2001), who identify that, in Canada, the majority of jurisdictions in education include the following categories of exceptionality: “learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, intellectual disabilities, emotional/behavioral disorders, multiple disabilities, auditory impairments, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, visual impairments, autism...and traumatic brain injury” (p. 7).

It is important to note that Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is not consistently approved for government funding for education in Canada under the above categories of exceptionality, and thus it was not included

in my literature review of children's and young adult fiction books. Fiction books about 'gifted' individuals were also omitted from the study sample, although consideration was given to Rudman's (1995) criteria that "although intellectual, artistic, creative, or leadership talents are not disabilities, gifted people do have special needs; they are sometimes treated in destructive ways by the rest of society. Most heroes in fantasies and fairy tales are gifted in one way or another; but it is more difficult to find children in stories about everyday life who are gifted and whose talents are respected, not instruments that invite punitive behaviour" (p. 318). While absent from the sample of books selected for this study, a number of titles that depict characters with ADHD and/or giftedness are listed in the Read-ons embedded within the annotated bibliography.

R. G. Thomson (1997) reframes 'disability' as another cultural construction of bodies and identity alongside race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. She also explains disability in more universal terms: "the fact that we all will become disabled if we live long enough is a reality many people...are reluctant to admit" (p. 14). Disability is not an absolute term, nor does it define the person to whom it is attached, although it is commonly used in these ways. I am utilizing the word 'disability' within this work because it is widely accepted in the contexts of education and social justice. Perhaps the most accurate rendering of the word is from people who view themselves as 'disabled,' because they alone can personalize a meaning within lived contexts.

In the context of Opper's (2007) fantasy novel *Darkwing, Dusk*, an arboreal glider with physical properties different from the others of his clan, asks

his sister, “Is different wrong?” (p. 83). *Darkwing’s* author speaks through this dialogue, asking readers to explore this question for themselves, and in the course of the story, the answer is complicated. As readers discover, Dusk is both penalized for his differences, and lauded—once the other gliders discover he is, in fact, a more evolved and therefore physically advanced form of their species.

Ableist Language

Ableism is “a pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional, and physical disabilities” (Rauscher & McClintock, 1997). Current attempts to counteract ableist sentiments in archaic terminology is evidenced in an increased use of ‘people first’ language such as a ‘person with a disability’ rather than a ‘disabled person,’ and, where possible, I strive to employ language in the most respectful manner possible although direct quotations may vary in this regard. Terms such as ‘handicapped’ and ‘invalid’ are outdated (Norden, 1994) and, except for their occasional appearance in direct quotations and titles of books and articles, will find no usage here. It is interesting to note that the titles of Baskin and Harris’s books—seminal studies regarding children’s literature about characters with disabilities—replace the word ‘handicapped’ (Baskin & Harris, 1977) with ‘disabled’ (Baskin & Harris, 1984).

Other language issues may also appear within the context of this study. In common usage, orientational metaphors, where high status is ‘up’ and low status is ‘down,’ originate from typical bodies’ functioning in their physical environments (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). May and Ferri (2008) elaborate how

“when disability shows up in our everyday language it almost always signals ignorance, confusion, lack, absence, and ineptitude” (p. 117). This generalization is exemplified by scholarly discourse that proposes critiques of thought as ‘blind,’ ‘deaf,’ ‘paralyzed,’ or ‘crazy’: it is apparent that “English abounds with disability metaphors” (S. L. Snyder, Brueggemann, & Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 1). While every attempt has been made to eliminate ableist metaphors from this dissertation, such metaphors may appear in quotations or titles and demonstrate our society’s “need to develop a cognitive awareness of a *lack of understanding*” (May & Ferri, 2008, p. 118). A focus on what has been a dearth of attention to issues related to disability connects to the transfer of ideas from what Eisner (2002) terms ‘null curriculum,’ into commonplace elements of classroom life—a movement that demonstrates how schools, language, and social understanding are continuously changing.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal design for learning is defined as “the design of instructional materials and activities that allows the learning goals to be achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember” (Orkwis & McLane, 1998, p. 10). Universal design thus implies flexible curricular materials with built-in accommodations that consider diversity in the conception of a curricular plan rather than as an add-on. In the case of books about characters with disabilities, I recommend the inclusion of books about diversity in its many

forms within the classroom reading curriculum rather than augmenting standard offerings with a unit, for example, on ‘disability literature.’

An attempt has been made to promote ‘universal design’ (Orkwis & McLane, 1998) by offering a copy of this thesis via the internet in order to accommodate readers’ differences in visual and auditory acuity; for inquiries, please contact me at beverley.brenna@usask.ca.

Other Terms and Conventions

For ease of description within the context of this study, ‘children’s fiction’ will be used as a comprehensive term to describe both children’s and young adult fiction. Also, the term ‘special needs’ will be used interchangeably with the term ‘disabilities,’ as it appears within the following example from Taylor Jane’s perspective as the protagonist in *Wild Orchid* (Brenna, 2005).

All of the boys I know are from my high school, and none of them wear golf shirts. Some of them talk to me, but none of them are boyfriend material because they think of me as someone who has special needs. When I’m eating lunch, sometimes boys sit at my table, but only if there are other girls there. Not once has a boy ever come to eat lunch just with me. Shauna, the teacher associate who worked with me, used to pick out a cute guy every now and then and ask me what I thought of him, but I’m not really that discerning. Jeans are nice. If they’re wearing jeans, I think they look good. (p. 27)

In terms of textual conventions in this dissertation, it is important to note that where quotations from children’s fiction are included, I have used italics to

set apart the text from the rest of the discussion. I have used italics and spacing in a similar fashion when quoting from my mother's oral stories (M. Stilborn, personal communication, September, 2008).

While I have included individual appendices containing samples of my introductory letter, information letter, and author conventions (Appendix A) and sample transcripts (Appendix B), as well as the chart I developed to support content analysis of the children's books (Appendix C), it is important to note that references regarding the 50 children's novels are included in three different appendices. Appendix D lists the novels that comprised the study sample; these texts, although cited in the main body of the dissertation, are not included in the main reference list. Appendix E is an annotated bibliography of the novels. Appendix F contains the references to the annotated bibliography, bolding the novels of the study sample while the other titles are presented in plain text.

CHAPTER TWO: RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review that follows offers a broad picture of critical literacy, within which discussions of particular books and authors reside. Critical literacy is presented as a conceptual framework for this research and is related to my decisions regarding the study of children's books and three individual authors, as well as to reflections that connect implications of the study to critical literacy as a classroom approach. An examination of historical trends and themes regarding books about characters with disabilities precedes a discussion of research on disability in contemporary literature, setting the context for further explorations of teaching, texts, and curriculum related to Radical Change Theory (Dresang, 1999) as well as to populations that have been, in the past, marginalized on the basis of 'difference'. The last section in this chapter identifies Bakhtin's chronotope (1981) as a lens through which the content analysis of the children's books in this study, as well as the portraiture of the authors, was accomplished.

Critical Literacy

Notions of critical literacy as a classroom approach to literacy teaching have been emerging since Freire's (1983; 1991; 1998) theoretical groundwork regarding the need for a critical stance with respect to literacy, a heightening of interest in the topic occurring in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Green, 2001). Just as critical theory is difficult to define because its tradition is continually changing and evolving (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002), the term critical literacy

has come to refer to a wide range of educational philosophies and curriculum interventions (Luke & Freebody, 1997) where “there are no generic universal critical or empowering literacies or pedagogies” and “these literacies must be worked out in specific locations” (Comber & Simpson, 2001, p. ix).

Critical literacy is discussed at length by Luke and Freebody (1997), who outline the distinctive approach to reading pedagogy as it foregrounds the critical social and cultural practices of reading. There are references to the underpinnings of critical literacy in a “critical sociology of the curriculum” as early as 1988 (Luke, 1988, p. 6), and to the relationship between social class and reading, discussing critical literacy as an organizing concept of critical democratic schooling where the knowledge of history plays an important role (Giroux, 1988). In Giroux’s view, the focus is on teachers who treat critical literacy as a “liberating remembrance” (p. 254). This view of literacy as liberation supports a call to educate students for active citizenship by teaching a “critical social literacy” (Lankshear & Knobel, 1997, p. 97).

Related to the concept of critical literacy as a support for citizenship is the idea that classrooms must provide spaces for the storied pasts of attending students, reflecting different learner perspectives in co-constructed learning goals (Orr, 2005). Educators who support diversity in schools can consider classroom texts as bridges to personal identity-making as well as catalysts for the social and cultural action required for “changing the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 49). This dual use of classroom texts relates to a call for children’s literature that involves children’s own experiences (Finazzo, 1997) as well as acknowledges the

importance of societal considerations in relation to the selection of classroom resources.

Elements of Freire's (1983; 1991; 1998) philosophy are seen in the call for critical literacy approaches that evaluate the legitimacy of curricular resources as well as propose learning as transformational to both the individual and to the society. In this dissertation, critical literacy is identified as a classroom approach that supports positive changes within individuals resulting in positive changes to the surrounding social fabric. Sensitivity to social context is encapsulated by Gee's (2001) term "socially perceptive literacy" (p. 15), a useful phrase that indicates the importance of social considerations alongside the more traditional decoding and encoding established as core practices of literate individuals (Luke & Freebody, 1997; McDaniel, 2006; Rudman, 1995; Wooldridge, 2001).

Luke and Freebody (1997) further define critical literacy practices as "an awareness of how, why, and in whose interests particular texts might work" (p. 218). Students, in Luke and Freebody's view, should learn, use, and refine strategies for talking about, rewriting, and contesting the contents of texts. Luke and Freebody also suggest that students bring diverse cultural, community and social resources, texts, and discourses to classroom study; Luke and Freebody's view emphasizes positive additions to classrooms rather than student differences, exemplifying Freire's (1983) pedagogy that students "in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 67).

The social considerations under scrutiny in relation to this dissertation involve the representation of characters with disabilities in past and contemporary

children's novels as well as the classroom practices that encourage students to read and reflect upon the messages included in these books. Discussing the absence as well as the representation of characters with disabilities in classroom texts is an example of how critical literacy can engage students to read 'the world' as well as 'the word,' through a 'pedagogy of love' that involves acts of critical reflection (Freire, 1983; 1991; 1998). Critical literacy was thus selected as the framework in which the primary research questions in this study were developed, focusing the dissertation on the depiction of disability in contemporary texts as well as on the perspectives of three of the authors who have created these texts.

The portraiture included as part of my dissertation offers an opportunity to hear from authors about their work, following Banks' (1996) advice: "We should teach students that knowledge is a social construction" (p. 78) and include the voices of "textbook authors" (p. 79) so that the classroom becomes a forum for the deconstruction of stereotypes. In anticipation of the resonance created by an exploration of influences on authorial process, the portraiture also involves Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of the chronotope as a lens through which to illuminate time and space. The portraiture has thus been designed to support critical literacy alongside an engagement with Discourse on a textual landscape that reflects societal diversity.

The term critical literacy has most recently been associated with definitions of multiliteracies (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996), further embracing the idea of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The inclusion of critical literacy with

'multiliteracies' offers increased opportunities to embrace the idea of critical consciousness within classroom activities. Conceptualizations of multiliteracies continue to evolve towards "negotiating a multiplicity of discourses...accounting for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies" as well as the increasing variety of text forms available (Cope & Kalantzis, p. 9), a phenomenon also associated with Radical Change theory (Dresang, 1999).

Further discussion has occurred in relation to the shifts in individual consciousness that students may experience while engaged in critical literacy classroom approaches. Changes have been identified regarding identity development, beliefs, and actions (McDaniel, 2006; Sarbin, 2004). Descriptions of the power of narrative equate with Sumara's (2002) conclusion that "during and following active involvement with the literary text, the reader reflects upon past, present and future experiences" (p. 94). In order to facilitate such explorations, educators must pay particular attention to differences in gender, cultural background, and ability when selecting representative texts for what Garland-Thomson (2006) calls "identity studies" (p. 257).

The idea that language both arises from social practice and shapes this practice (Morgan, 1997) is a powerful one with regard to social justice perspectives, where the belief is that educators have a responsibility to offer classroom experiences that encourage students to examine and then transcend given text, comparing and contrasting aspects of that text to their understanding of reality. Diversity within and among resources is seen as imperative in cultivating

the understanding of multiple perspectives that is so necessary for empathy development (Greene, 1995). Classroom strategies which require students to learn critical reading practices, along with decoding, text-meaning, and pragmatic skills and strategies, form the basis for addressing current issues (Creighton, 1997; Luke & Freebody, 1997), connecting a reading of ‘the word’ to a reading of ‘the world’ (Freire, 1983; 1991; 1998). In addition, within a critical literacy framework, student writers are supported in viewing writing as “a form of social action” (Heffernan, 2004, p. ix).

The exploration of coding practices alongside their social context is discussed by Gee (1989), who differentiates connected stretches of meaningful language, which he terms ‘discourse,’ with its surrounding ‘Discourse’ of context. Gee defines ‘Discourses’ as “ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (pp. 6 – 7). Critical literacy may thus be considered a ‘Discourse’ as it combines traditional work regarding language use—reading and writing, for example— with the practice of critical, social thinking. This practice is conceptualized by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys’ (2002) four dimensions framework regarding critical literacy: “(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice” (p. 382), and I further employ this four dimensions framework in terms of the implications of the study in Chapter Six.

Recent Studies on Critical Literacy Approaches

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) explore the complexities of studying classroom practices from critical literacy perspectives, offering that published writing about critical literacy has “recently expanded from mostly theoretical pieces to include an increased number of teacher-authored accounts describing critical literacy practices in classrooms” (p. 382). Classroom-based accounts of critical literacy practices have included “rich narratives of classroom activity without making visible methodological approaches, procedures, or data sources” (Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006, p. 200).

In addition to concerns related to rigor, studying literacy practices in general requires “time, thought, and tools to facilitate complex research processes” (Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006, p. 201), and the complexities involved in studying classroom practices related to critical literacy extend to long term evaluation of goals such as the processing of ideals related to social justice as well as societal change. McDaniel (2006), elaborating with respect to shifts in individual consciousness as a result of critical literacy approaches, indicates that “it is unwise to speed up the process by insisting on immediate, tangible results without sufficient time for reflection” (p. 24).

Discourses—which, as I have previously discussed, include critical literacy— “are not bodies of knowledge like physics or archaeology or linguistics. Therefore, ironically, while you can overtly teach someone linguistics, a body of knowledge, you can’t teach them to be a linguist, that is, to use a Discourse. The most you can do is to let them practice being a linguist with you” (Gee, 1989, p.

7). Likewise, while we teach children to read, we can't teach them to be critical readers other than through practice in being critical readers with us. What students achieve on their own in terms of their individual practices of critical literacy is difficult to measure, a factor that makes research regarding the teaching of 'critical literacy' incompatible with traditional evaluation schemes.

In contrast to recommendations regarding the inclusion of critical literacy practices in contemporary classrooms, there are warnings regarding the suitability of the implementation of critical literacy in the elementary school. Many educators believe that critical studies are not relevant or are too complex for the primary school. Kemp (2001) offers a contradictory view to this criticism and uses gender in an example of how simple readings and classroom activities can serve to broaden even young children's ideas about social constructions. Gilbert (2001) maintains that classroom activities which engage critical literacy are difficult to construct. However, she illustrates that practice in reading critically in one area, such as gender, extends possibilities for independent reading against dominant stories in other areas (p. 81). Other recent research with young children is available, although in limited scope. Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004), for example, illustrate how an understanding and an appreciation of other cultures can be supported through the sharing of fairy tales and storytelling with young children.

Creighton (1997) considers the possibility of actualizing critical literacy in elementary classrooms and offers three areas in which critical literacy helps educators inform their practice: firstly, through an acknowledgement of the social complexity of the reading process; secondly, through awareness of positions of

power and authority within the educational structure; thirdly, and most important for my research at hand, through our close examination of texts for diverse representation and possible biases. Comber (2001) offers a framework for educators of young children regarding the manner that texts are based on decisions about presenting the world, and are not necessarily the world. Comber cites writing to an author as one simple way of differentiating a text from its creator, helping students realize that books come from particular and individual perspectives. Further work with classroom participants is needed, however, to determine the efficacy of these approaches.

Although there is limited classroom research that explores the effects of critical literacy practices at early grade levels, there is a growing number of studies regarding middle school and high school populations as well as the responses of college students. Hope (2008) outlines ethnographic experiences sharing 'refugee' literature with children ages 10 to 16, and the personal and empathetic responses elicited by these readings. Athanases (1998) discusses a yearlong ethnographic study that examined two urban American 10th grade English classes in which teachers diversified literature selections for new curricula. Student identification with characters and texts was reported as an avenue through which readers reflected on personal concerns as well as an identification of stereotypes, and the manner in which students engaged with texts was positively influenced by instruction. A study of junior high readers confirms that students, in the multi-ethnic classrooms considered as part of the research

project, valued opportunities to read books with multi-racial characters that dealt with issues of marginalization, integration, loss, and gain (Johnston, 2000).

Critical literacy, emerging from a paradigm of critical theory that addresses individual and societal transformation, offers a provocative approach towards curriculum, and one that corresponds with reader-response theories allowing that readers make meaning from texts within a socio-cultural context (Rosenblatt, 2005). Further research is needed to present classroom structures that support critical literacy, as well as provide examples of literature that include characterizations of disability along with sensitivities to diversity in terms of culture and gender. In addition to recommendations for educators regarding books about characters with disabilities, it is important that current studies assist in building a rationale for why certain books and methods for sharing them are important in a historical context, highlighting changes regarding the social construction of disability in texts, and the importance of an awareness of these changes.

Summary and Implications of Critical Literacy

Critical literacy, explored within this dissertation as “socially perceptive literacy” (Gee, 2001, p. 15), has the potential to support explorations of self and society through classroom resources and teacher-constructed activities, with implications for the consideration of curriculum commonplaces in terms of teacher, student, milieu, and subject matter (Schwab, 1978). Diversity is seen as important when selecting representative texts, and classroom tasks have the potential to assist students with identity construction as well as the more distant

goal of societal change. As stated by Freire, "a critical reading of the world is intimately related to a historical and cultural reading of the world" and "there cannot be reading of text without reading the world, without reading the context" (Macedo, 1994, p. xi), implying a 'pedagogy of love' that demonstrates respect for all people (Freire, 1983; 1991; 1998).

While much attention has been placed on gender and multicultural diversity with regard to classroom texts (Finazzo, 1997; Galda, 1998; Gilbert, 1997, 2001; Ramírez & Gallardo, 2001; Rueda, 1998), little focus has been given to the characterization of ability (Keith, 2001), although there are limited discussions of the treatment of particular disabilities within contemporary fiction (Dyches & Prater, 2000; Dyches, Prater, & Cramer, 2001; Greenwell, 2004; Kalke-Klita, 2005; Mills, 2002; Pajka-West, 2007). Picture-book illustrations are illuminated as a particular lens for studying the inclusion of characters with disabilities in children's material (Matthew & Clow, 2007), and another direction for study includes a discussion of how books about characters with disabilities may be evaluated and used with children (Dyches & Prater, 2000; Landrum, 2001; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003). My dissertation's focus on the portrayal of characters with disabilities in Canadian children's fiction further illuminates the topic of disability in children's literature as an important one for critical study, and reflects the value of examining texts in their context (Said, 2003b).

History of Depictions of Fictional Characters with Special Needs

Writing can be viewed as a social construction, with the writing process mediating cultural knowledge with textuality. "Writers draw from ideological and

discursive systems while at the same time the discourses define the choices available to them” (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 14). This duality reflects Freire’s (1991) descriptions of the importance of connections between the word and the world, and, as Luce-Kapler suggests, “raises important issues about the complexity of text creation and the politics of discourse structure and analysis” encouraging writers to “push at boundaries and rewrite genres that more clearly represent a multitude of experiences and perspectives” (p. 16).

Images of disability in 19th century British children’s literature provide a source of information on how people with disabilities were viewed at that time (I. Davidson, Woodill, & Bredberg, 1994). Saxby (1997) indicates that “children’s books, as with other forms of literature, mirror the outlook, philosophies and values of the society that produces them” (p. 77), reflecting Dresang’s (1999) comments regarding how changes in books for young people reflect societal changes. There appears to be a tendency, in classical literary representations for adults, where depictions of disability are “almost invariably marked by the grossly stereotypical attributes of sin and evil and weakness” (Liachowitz, 1988, p. 7), and characters with disabilities are produced to be “damned and to be pitied” (Kriegel, 1987, p. 32).

Hays (1971) discusses lameness in ancient as well as 20th century texts, and concludes that “lameness as a literary device is usually either symbolic of, or a euphemism for, a genital wound; the wound, in turn, symbolizes a social disability” (p. 4). Texts surviving from ancient Greece equate deafness with diminished cognitive ability as well as impaired verbal communication (Rose, 2006). Baynton (2006) describes assumptions about deafness prior to the 1860s, indicating that “it

was most often described as an affliction that isolated the individual from the Christian community” and that, after the 1860s, it was depicted as isolating the bearer from the “national community” (p. 33). Kriegel (1987) offers a rationale for the tendency to ascribe negative stereotypes to characters with special needs, stating that images about disability exist in literature because of societal assumptions. Kriegel’s rationale is reflected by Freire’s (1998) statement: “We have a strong tendency to affirm that what is different from us is inferior. We start from the belief that our way of being is not only good but better than that of others who are different from us. This is intolerance” (p. 71). Longmore (1987) offers an alternative viewpoint to Freire (1998), attributing stereotypes about disability to hidden anxieties about the possibility of disablement to us or someone close to us: “What we fear, we often stigmatize and shun and sometimes seek to destroy” (p. 66).

What critical study there is regarding disability in early children’s literature describes patterns similar to the trends identified in classical adult texts. R. G. Thomson (1997) discusses how folktales manifest “the disabled body...almost always a freakish spectacle presented by the mediating narrative voice” (p. 10). Dyches and Prater (2005) outline how classic fairy tales portray physical differences as metaphors for characters’ inner qualities, and state that the presentation of characters with disabilities in children’s literature has evolved over time. Keith (2001) offers similar views, elaborating on how disability and illness were used as metaphors in the didactic, warm, family stories of the 19th century novel, and were “devices to bring the character through a period of trial or desolation into the bright light of resolution and a happy ending” (p. 194). In

addition, Keith indicates that authors of characters in 19th and early 20th century novels tended to “kill or cure their disabled characters with worrying ease” (p. 5). She also discusses how illness and accident were popular story devices in 19th century Victorian novels where authors sought to accomplish the ‘taming’ of female adolescent characters.

Other patterns that Keith (2001) addresses relate to the popularity of particular disabilities in early fiction as well as societal viewpoints about disability. She states that between 1920 and 1955, polio and blindness tended to outweigh all other disabilities referenced in classic fiction, a trend partially related to the prominence of these exceptionalities in English speaking society at that time. Baskin and Harris (1977), in a seminal study of books about characters with ‘handicaps,’ list forty-three titles that include characters with disabilities, and, of these titles, ten involve characters who are blind, while thirteen deal with characters who have survived polio. Keith qualifies that in the 1940s and 50s: “Blindness in stories was reflected in excess of its actual occurrence and it continued to offer the metaphorical possibilities that have interested writers since storytelling began—that by not seeing the superficial world, one is able to see the essence” (p. 199). As L. J. Davis (2006a) indicates: “From the typicality of the central character, to the normalizing devices of plot to bring deviant characters back into the norms of society, to the normalizing coda of endings, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel promulgates and disburses notions of normalcy and by extension makes of physical differences ideological differences” (p. 15).

In the classics Keith (2001) studied, the following ideologies were pervasive:

- (1) there is nothing good about being disabled;
- (2) disabled people have to learn the same qualities of submissive behaviour that women have always had to learn: patience, cheerfulness, and making the best of things;
- (3) impairment can be a punishment for bad behaviour, for evil thoughts or for not being a good enough person;
- (4) although disabled people should be pitied rather than punished, they can never be accepted;
- (5) the impairment is curable. If you want to enough, if you love yourself enough (but not more than you love others), if you believe in God enough, you will be cured. (p. 7)

Keith's discussion emphasizes standard historical responses to disablement, and her exploration of societal assumptions about disability reflect R. G. Thomson's (1997) work. R. G. Thomson outlines how the assumptions of society offer a rationale regarding the interpretation of a character with a disability: "Disabled literary characters usually remain on the margins of fiction as uncomplicated figures or exotic aliens whose bodily configurations operate as spectacles, eliciting responses from other characters or producing rhetorical effects that depend on disability's cultural resonance" (p. 9). R. G. Thomson also discusses how representation relies on cultural assumptions to fill in missing details, a factor which benefits the plot through its very economy and may explain

the missing discussions of characterization of disability in reviews and academic papers: "...when literary critics look at disabled characters, they often interpret them metaphorically or aesthetically, reading them without political awareness as conventional elements...of traditions" (pp. 9 – 10).

Historically, then, characters with disabilities were produced as stereotypical portraits whose purpose in novels was to advance the plot and whose interpretation relied on cultural assumptions. Within early texts, disability is presented as a punishing condition that isolates characters from happiness and societal acceptance, although impairments are often presented as curable through individual desire and heartfelt displays of religion. I conjecture that historical socio-cultural contexts have informed authors' depictions of characters with disabilities, although few studies have been conducted to measure this phenomenon.

Research on Disability in Contemporary Literature

In the last half of the 20th century, although writers aimed for greater realism, they still found it "hard to imagine what kind of life there can be for someone who is disabled" (Keith, 2001, p. 197), and could not imagine a character moving towards a happy life as a grown-up disabled person. Such lack of imagination is contrary to advances in medical science which imply that "people born with an impairment are less likely to die in childhood and can expect a full and rewarding life" (Keith, p. 196). Keith also indicates that, "Many writers of the new wave of books in the 1960s, 1970s and beyond have been unable to create a disabled character who is not weighed down with feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred" (p. 212). Keith's

identification that authors rarely presented the prospect of a positive future for book characters with disabilities mirrors a statement by Little (1990) who says, “Why couldn’t any of these authors imagine a happy ending that was honest? Did they, deep down, believe that you could not remain disabled and have a full, joyful life?”(p. 9). Similar sentiments are offered by Kent (1987) who states that in her childhood reading materials, “I longed to find proof that disability need not bar me from all of the pleasures and perils that other girls regarded as their birthright” (p. 47).

Contemporary depictions of disability no longer tend to rest on the miracle cure but, surprisingly, “death still remains a popular option” (Keith, 2001, p. 207).” Current explorations in critical studies of children’s literature provide further discussion of patterns, although such studies are limited. Dyches and Prater’s (2005) qualitative, descriptive study examines children’s fiction, published between 1999 and 2003, that qualified for the *Dolly Gray Award* recognizing literature that characterizes developmental disabilities. Findings indicate that most characters are realistic, positive, and dynamic, and the researchers suggest that “current fictional children’s books that characterize people with developmental disabilities are generally more positive than they have been in the past” (p. 215) although this is implicitly a biased sample on which to make those assumptions. Dyches and Prater’s study builds upon their own previous work as well as the work of other researchers who focus on single categories of disability represented primarily in contemporary American children’s texts (Dyches, Prater, & Cramer, 2001; Mills, 2002; Prater, 2003).

The investigation of fiction about characters with disabilities in terms of single categories—research that focuses exclusively on developmental disabilities (Dyches, Prater, & Cramer, 2001; Mills, 2002; Prater, 2003), polio (Foertsch, 2009), or Down Syndrome (Kalke-Klita, 2005)— may reflect the history of disability studies in contrast to its recent evolution as a comprehensive entity. As L. J. Davis (2006b) states, “...there have been people with disabilities throughout history, but it has only been in the last twenty years that one-armed people, quadriplegics, the blind, people with chronic diseases, and so on, have seen themselves as a single, allied, united physical minority” (p. xvi).

Limited research regarding autobiography and biography implies that change in representations of the oppressed and culturally displaced may be occurring through “disability life writing,” counteracting “marginalizing representations of disability in contemporary culture” (Couser, 2006, p. 401). As Keith (2001) indicates: “As a disabled woman, I too look at the world differently and there are issues and ideas, apparently invisible to others, which are very real to me” (p. 9). Keith’s description of her own individual stance exemplifies that “the nature and identity of a civilization are never taken as unquestioned axioms by every single member of that civilization” (Said, 2003a, p. 78).

As Minaki (2009) indicates, “Eventually, it hit me that if I wanted to avoid being seen as ‘courageous’ for the wrong reasons (simply for getting out of bed and living the full and productive life we are meant to enjoy), the solution is to use my writing as a vehicle of my activism, to portray the lives of people with disabilities as lives lived by people of purpose, dignity, resilience and focus” (p. 13). In a similar

vein, Janz (2004) states in the author's note for her semi-autobiographical historical novel *Sparrows on Wheels* that it was originally written as a Master's thesis to demonstrate what life was like growing up in the pre-integration era where the education of people with disabilities occurred primarily in 'special' schools.

The following excerpt from Janz (2004) depicts a scene from a case conference between Tallia, a young woman with multiple disabilities who is attending a hospital school, and her support team, who have been pressing for her to attend a regular high school:

Tallia could not longer sit idly by and watch while other people prepared to make decisions about her life. "Why isn't anybody asking me what I think?" she blurted out. "After all, it is my life we're talking about here, right?"

Mr. Murphy nodded. "All right, Tallia. How do you feel?"

"I think it's a bad idea. There's no way I'm putting myself through all the hassle of trying to fit into a regular high school, just for the sake of a couple of measly courses. Besides, I seriously doubt if any teacher would take me on without a full-time aide, and that's really a bad idea."

"Why do you say that?" challenged Mr. Murphy. "We've been able to integrate other students with full-time aides."

"Yeah, like Jo-Anne Hanson, who keeps having to switch to going part-time every few months because her latest aide has quit!" (pp. 207 – 208)

It is through differing perspectives of individuals that we make up a collective whole, and thus it is important that our educational curricula reflect the stories of the students we teach (Orr, 2005), seeking to nurture inclusive landscapes

both inside, and outside, our classrooms. In some cases, the topic of exceptionality has been viewed as part of multiculturalism “because of the need to address prejudices and biases that might arise from the inclusion of students with special needs” (Finazzo, 1997, p. 114). The philosophy of inclusive education, however, goes beyond the idea that mainstream groups need books to help understand the ‘other.’ Inclusive education implies that books about disability, for example, relate on multiple levels to the lived lives of the students we teach, and should therefore be part of our classroom curricula.

P. Thomson (1992) surmises that “we are unlikely to be fully satisfied” with books about characters who have disabilities “until disabled writers start to come through in greater numbers” (p. 24). This statement mirrors Charlotte Brontë and Virginia Woolf’s philosophies regarding perspectives on women, namely that “if women were to achieve equality in society, they first had to make the voices of their own imaginations heard through literature” (Meyer, 2007, p. 70). Kent (1988) comments that though “a number of disabled women have written autobiographies, few, if any, have ventured to translate their experiences into fiction and drama. As the struggles of disabled women draw increasing attention through scholarly studies and autobiographical accounts, perhaps women with impairments will feel more free to express themselves in literary forms accessible to the general public” (p. 110). It is also possible that a past lack of access to literacy in marginalized populations may have limited the “registering of the experience of oppression, or the claiming of a political voice” (Swindells, 1995, p. 7).

Radical Change Theory

Radical Change theory (Dresang, 1999) relates to critical literacy in the manner in which it foregrounds elements of texts: altered forms and formats, changing boundaries, and changing perspectives that occur through emerging patterns of connectivity, interactivity, and access. Dresang and Kotrla (2009) indicate that Radical Change fits the tradition of Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of the chronotope, recognizing that "temporal and spatial relationships in the digital world" have resulted in "interactivity, connectivity, and access in books for youth. Therefore, the definitions of interactivity, connectivity, and access...are contemporary time/space concepts influenced by and reflective of actions made possible by digital technologies" (p.95).

Books about characters with disabilities fit under Dresang's (1999) theoretical lens as she indicates that "the subjugated, unheard voices that are emerging in contemporary literature are not related to ethnicity alone but speak out on previously unrecognized aspects of gender, sexual orientation, occupation, socio-economic level, and ability/disability" (p. 26). These new perspectives in literature are based on changes in how we view the world as well as expressions of voices we have not had previous opportunities to hear (Yokata & Cai, 2003).

As a theory that specifically addresses the depiction of characters with disabilities, among other textual characteristics, Radical Change was selected as a perspective of interest related to this study. Dresang's (1999) notion of change with regard to children's books is encapsulated by the analogy of a "rhizome—a horizontal, root-like structure with sprouts here, there and everywhere (first used by

French thinkers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in the 1980s to describe an ideal book)” (p. xviii). Dresang explains: “I think of the entire body of existing literature for youth as a sort of rhizome...from which new developments emerge in a random, spontaneous manner” (p. 4). Radical Change theory is useful, according to Dresang, in the manner in which it offsets a ‘tyranny against the rhizome’ in literature for young people, reinforcing the positive aspects of books in the digital age. The features of the ‘sprouts’ along the root of Radical Change imply exclusivity in the field of children’s books—connected to the main root, yet heterogeneous and nonlinear in their development. Rather than emerging in a preprogrammed manner, books in the digital age, according to Dresang, may manifest only some of the characteristics she attributes to Radical Change, and, over time, these characteristics will become less remarkable in light of their growing numbers. This implies that books which demonstrate new Radical Change characteristics are temporarily extraordinary.

Dresang (1999) discusses the developmental stages of literature about children with special needs, indicating: “When books about young people with disabilities first started proliferating in the 1970s and 1980s, an exclusively positive portrayal of characters represented the group. This seems to have been intended to redress the very negative images that were often present in the past. Neither stance allowed for depth of character development, but over time the portrayals were enriched and diversified. Radical Change points to books in which authors explore characterizations, inner emotions, and issues not considered acceptable for children in the past—or by some in the present” (p. 134). Dresang goes on to note:

“Collectively these books allow young people to experience a wide variety of mental and physical challenges, to draw conclusions of their own, and to begin to comprehend the diversity that exists among previously marginalized people” (p. 135).

As a framework for literary criticism, Dresang’s (1999) conceptualization of Radical Change as relating to connectivity, interactivity, and access regarding the digital world is intriguing in its categorization of literature. Radical Change Type One is identified through ‘changing forms and formats’ and these books incorporate one or more of the following: “graphics in new forms and formats; words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy; nonlinear organization and format; nonsequential organization and format; multiple layers of meaning; and interactive formats” (p. 19). Radical Change Type Two involves ‘changing perspectives’ and includes: multiple perspectives, visual and verbal; previously unheard voices; youth who speak for themselves” (p. 24). Radical Change Type Three pertains to books that offer ‘changing boundaries’ and provide: “subjects previously forbidden; settings previously overlooked; characters portrayed in new, complex ways; new types of communities; unresolved endings” (p. 26).

In general, there is a dearth of evidence regarding characterizations of disability in contemporary Canadian children’s fiction, and a lack of discussion beyond single categories of ‘disability labels’ with regard to North American books. This study further explores patterns and trends through a specific focus on Canadian books within a larger treatment of depictions of disability than past research has afforded. Content analysis of these books reflects characteristics of Radical Change

in terms of ‘changing perspectives’ through the inclusion of previously unheard voices as characters with disabilities are presented in increasing numbers. Of the 50 texts in the study sample, eight were published in the seven-year period from 1995 to 2001. Thirty-six were published in the seven-year period from 2002 to 2008, with an additional six appearing in 2009. Two other features of ‘changing perspectives’ within this sample of texts involve the multiple perspectives presented within particular novels as well as the tendency in some of these books for youth with disabilities to speak from the first-person voice.

In addition, the richness of characterization in many of the texts offers an example of ‘changing boundaries’ where characters with disabilities are presented in new, complex ways—going beyond the simple use of characters with disabilities as plot devices. While this study is not evaluative in terms of literary qualities of the novels in the study sample, it offers the opportunity for further exploration of characterization as multi-faceted.

A consideration of Radical Change books is only one part of the equation for educators. Another part is the usability of books in classroom communities. Teachers must recognize not only the importance of introducing diverse perspectives through literature, but also the flexibility of books about characters with disabilities in supporting curricular themes beyond an isolated glance at ‘disability literature.’ In addition, teachers must be prepared to negotiate their way through the potential for controversy that some of these books imply through other Radical Change characteristics. While characters with disabilities have tended to be developed in this study sample without regard for diversity in sexual orientation, there are occasionally

secondary characters who are homosexual. There are also characters dealing with heterosexuality in explicit ways—‘subjects previously forbidden’ and addressed by Dresang (1999) regarding ‘changing boundaries’. To prepare for any negotiation of controversy, teachers must consider personal agency as well as their role as educators in a changing world.

Critical literacy is an approach that provides the substantial framework needed for the indepth consideration of radically changed texts in educational contexts. In turn, the exploration of radically changed texts supports the development of critical literacy in students, assisting readers in attending to the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) through disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice.

Teacher Agency, Performativity, and Null Curriculum Related to Marginalized Populations

Teacher agency is important as a bridge between curriculum development and classroom practice and, in the context of this dissertation, reflects the actual practice of educators who consciously support diversity through critical literacy approaches. Agency can be defined as “persons’ ability to shape and control their own lives, freeing self from the oppression of power” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 2), reminiscent of the conclusion that agency is a term reliant on “the notion of some internal force” (Grosz, 2003, p. 14). Such definitions imply the importance of personal mindsets in allowing “the lessons that history can teach us” (Grosz, p. 23), however they don’t specify the nuances of agency that are required for close examination of its presence and potential for curriculum studies.

Four core properties of human agency have been identified that can be applied to curriculum development and actualization: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness where the latter two categories respectively involve taking action beyond the initial stages of choices and planning evaluating one’s personal efficacy (Bandura, 2008). Bainbridge and (2010) illustrate a study that shows how intentionality and forethought were heightened in preservice teachers through the study of multicultural picture books, but that agency in these teachers was blocked in the area of self-reactiveness. The preservice teachers in this study reported that anxiety regarding controversy would prevent them from moving past the initial stages of a design to include a

number of these picture books in their classrooms even while they believed that the issues raised in these books were important for children to consider.

Performativity (Butler, 1993, 1997; Ruitenberg, 2004) is a concept that illuminates how one's actions are shaped by belief systems that may have been influenced by traditional designs—what Keith (2001) refers to as the lessons readers have been learning about disability from classic fiction. Rather than deeming the issues in children's stories unsuitable, adults should assist children in talking about what they read and helping them learn to express their judgements (Meek, 1988).

The notion of performativity illustrates how barriers to self-reactiveness arise from societal influences as a reiteration of a norm or set of norms. To the extent that performativity “acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (Butler, 1993, p. 12). Butler emphasizes that heterosexual behavior is thus privileged as the original and the norm. Sherry (2008) extends Butler's thinking: “A similar argument could be made around non-disabled privilege—but unfortunately this is an argument Butler fails to address. Even though Butler's work is limited by its failure to engage sufficiently with disability studies, it is possible to extend her arguments about power and the body into the realm of disability” (p. 158). Sherry goes on to emphasize that literature on performativity reminds us that disability is a social construct, not a biological given.

Just as performativity makes apparent the connectedness of disability to societal contexts, discourse itself is a cultural product, “recognizable as a *citation*,

a repetition in a new context of an earlier instance...not exact copies or replicas of earlier instances, but *iterations*, repetitions that alter” (Ruitenbergh, 2007, p. 263) and produced as “re-presentations” rather than images that mirror reality (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 76). It matters how portrayals of characters with disabilities are mediated through texts—how these characters are presented in time and space—just as it matters how teachers and students respond to these portrayals.

It is possible to imagine teaching as an iteration of past practice, repositioning self-reactiveness in a framework that is not entirely in opposition to the status quo, offering texts that ‘re-present’ social issues in alternative ways. Teachers who encourage discussions of societal issues on the classroom landscape are not ‘going against’ tradition, but actually working with tradition in the way that education has always been transformative. One book studied in class thus leads to another. It is also possible to identify the re-presentation of traditional texts with Radical Change, considering contemporary work in terms of changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries (Dresang, 1999).

Null curriculum (Eisner, 2002) relates to Freire’s (1983) ideas regarding a silence that “suggests a structure of mutism in the face of the overwhelming force of the limit-situations” (p. 97). There are, however, many opportunities to bring that which has been absent into being. It is through a consideration of performativity and iteration that educators may further develop agency, assisting in the transformation of a curriculum towards the re-presentation of social justice ideals.

Eisner's (2002) advice that "we ought to examine school programs to locate those areas of thought and those perspectives that are now absent in order to reassure ourselves that these omissions were not a result of ignorance but a product of choice" (p. 98) offers an alternative rationale for traditional exclusion of 'disability issues' in classroom discourse: that teachers have simply been unaware of the silences surrounding people with special needs. It is a main purpose of this dissertation to foreground aspects of children's fiction that relate to disability issues in order to promote diversity in classroom resources as well as to offer critical literacy as an approach, with diversity in mind, for sharing resources with students. In explorations of texts that contain societal stereotypes, Ruitenberg's (2007) advancement of Butler's concept of performativity, along with Ruitenberg's own conceptualization of the forward path of texts as citations, work alongside *Radical Change* (Dresang, 1999) to encourage educators in dealing with issues of censorship as well as diversity on a changing landscape of children's fiction.

The Chronotope as a Lens Through Which to Explore Texts and the Influences on

Authors of Texts

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) was a radical theorist of language and literature whose ideas have influenced literary studies, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and social theory; many scholars concentrate on Bakhtin himself, while others apply his ideas to various subjects of analysis (Hitchcock, 2008; Holquist, 2002). It was my objective to utilize Bakhtin's (1981) idea of the 'chronotope,' a concept borrowed from Einstein's

theory of relativity in relation to the interconnectedness of space and time, as a lens through which I could develop the author portraits and the content analysis of the 50 books in my study sample. Bakhtin identified the literary chronotope as a conceptualization of ‘time-space’— a way to explore the complex and mediated relationship between life and art. Bakhtin thus defined the literary chronotope as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature... Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (p. 84).

The choice to consider the chronotope as a lens for my study was related to its clear applicability to my research questions as well as to the roots of this dissertation in social constructionism and critical theory. The idea of the chronotope emerged from my reading in ‘dialogism’—the name scholars have awarded Bakhtin’s concept of text, a concept whose master assumption is that there is “no figure without a ground” (Holquist, 2002, p. 22) and which conceives of all discourse as an intersection of multiple voices (Hitchcock, 2008). Within this view of dialogism is an implicit reminder that text is always in construction. Further ideas in this regard may be found in Holquist (2002), who outlines the concept of the literary chronotope as it has been used specifically in relation to novels. In his discussion of Bakhtin’s rendering of the chronotope, Holquist relates to genre as a wide possibility for arranging time and space within which authors develop particularities. In addition, Holquist allows that genre provides a

patterned arrangements of space-time, and that novels also reflect a work space involved in the shaping of cultural history.

Performativity and iteration can be related to Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism alongside definitions of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999). Texts represent the past and imply the future through multiple voices and viewpoints that operate as iterations, reflecting societal norms as well as transcending these norms. Just as education is iterative in the way that curricula represent and yet alter past practice, texts as iterations of past discourse have tremendous potential in a critical literacy approach that takes note of the social perceptiveness of narrative voices along with the changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries foregrounded as part of Radical Change.

Bakhtin's insights through dialogism have also been utilized in Kristeva's (1986) notion of intertextuality, where "the word as minimal textual unit thus turns out to occupy the status of *mediator*, linking structural models to cultural (historical) environment" (p. 37). Kristeva's analysis of texts "seeks those places in language that open the possibility of individual and social transformation" (Hitchcock, 2008). The concept of intertextuality is important as I explore contemporary fiction novels that echo and transcend, as iterations, messages from traditional texts.

To comment upon Kyle's death in McNicoll's (2006) *Beauty Returns*, for example, it is important to consider past themes where authors were unable to imagine a happy future for a character with a disability. While jarring in the sense that *Beauty Returns* actualizes the stereotype of death as the outcome for a

character with a disability, it is interesting to note the tensions between Kyle's actual and anticipated future, and it is in this way that readers are introduced to consider a stereotype that, in past texts, remained covert. In classic novels such as *Little Women*, for example, actual and imagined futures were one; Beth did not see herself as growing and changing over time but remained content as a static representative of hearth and home until her eventual demise. Kyle, in contrast, fights against stereotypes throughout the course of the novel. He does not gracefully accept his blindness. He develops new friendships. He falls in love with Liz, and she with him. Kyle's sudden death is shocking, reverberating as it does with a 'traditional' ending in tension with 'what might have been.'

The chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981) has thus provided a useful lens for the consideration of time-space as it appears in relationship to the contemporary fiction and author portraits utilized as part of this study. Bakhtin saw novels as products that rely on "references to an entire complex web of past and present discourses within their culture" (Sim & Van Loon, 2004, p. 57). Time and space with respect to the content of books goes beyond intertextuality towards a chronotope that invites readers to consider the text as a 'time travel device,' encouraging individual response through reminiscences of personal pasts, conceptualizations and re-conceptualizations of personal presents, and imaginings of personal futures. In this way, the chronotope itself operates 'externally' to the texts, beyond the story, as readers transcend actual time and place, as well as 'internally' to the characters within the texts themselves.

In this study, I have employed Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of the chronotope through further considerations of Holquist's (2002) discussion of the 'intratextual' nature of chronotopes. The result is an identification of aspects of time and space that operate 'internally' to the sample of children's novels as well as the aspects of time-space that operate 'externally' to the novels in relation to the three authors involved in the portraiture. Holquist emphasizes that varying functions are served by the conceptualization of the chronotope in terms of textual analysis, and advises treating the term " 'bifocally,' as it were: invoking it in any particular case, one must be careful to discriminate between its use as a lens for close-up work and its ability to serve as an optic for seeing at a distance" (p. 113), what Greene (1995) differentiates as seeing 'big' and seeing 'small.'

To further focus the internal and external chronotopic lenses, I have utilized the three-dimensional space associated with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to establish elements of temporality, social context, and place. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach to research connected with experience and story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, 1998, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). The research framework of narrative inquiry involves "temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along a third" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). In other words, the metaphor of a three-dimensional inquiry space was delineated to point researchers "backward and forward, inward and outward" as well as directing them towards a consideration of place (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 54). This three-dimensional framework was thus utilized in focusing an indepth look at the contemporary

children's books in this study as well as the three authors involved in the portraiture.

Summary

Rather than dismissing traditional literature for its stereotypical renderings of characters with disabilities, it is important to acknowledge the iterations of past discourse in contemporary texts as well as reflect on the value of utilizing traditional literature in classrooms for the purposes of disrupting commonplace themes—one of the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Positive readings of classics such as *Little Women*, *Heidi*, and *The Secret Garden* can occur, for example, while at the same time inviting students to discuss what might be troubling in the representations of characters with disabilities within these texts.

Although neglected in terms of previous academic study, constructs of disability in children's books appear within Radical Change Theory (Dresang, 1999) as intriguing social constructions worth contemplation. Widening the lens of critical literacy to include consideration of resources chosen for particular representations of ability and disability, and attention to methods for sharing these resources, may indeed be the next major focus of critical literacy as an instructional approach. Such a focus stems from the socially conscious roots of critical theory, and promotes critical analysis of text, personal identity formation, and social justice themes within contemporary curriculum development.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

Willis et al. (2008) differentiate methodology—“the philosophies that underlie research”—and method—“the processes and techniques of research” (p. 50). Crotty (1998) further denotes methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods...” while delineating ‘theoretical perspective’ as the “philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process...” (p. 3). I have selected portraiture (Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997) as my methodology—the underlying design of the research—supported by a framework drawn from critical theory, shaded by an epistemology gently based on social constructionism and outlined by a realist ontology. In other words, I have acknowledged that there is a real world relative to the knower, allowing that “meaning is not discovered but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).

The portraits of two Canadian authors who write about characters with disabilities in children’s fiction, as well as a self-portrait, have been rendered here as a form of case study research (Merriam, 1998). While case studies are described as having considerable depth of inquiry combined with a grand scope (Yin, 2004), portraiture offers the potential of a more focused perspective designed towards resonance with eclectic audiences as well as acknowledging outright through artistic license that “the voice of the researcher is everywhere” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997, p. 85). In addition, portraiture is a

methodology that links “inquiry to public discourse and social transformation” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, p. 14), a reflection also of the goals of critical theory that underpin this dissertation.

Portraiture is a logical choice within this research design as it relies heavily on the co-construction of sketches between ‘artist’ and ‘subject,’ a relationship that reflects the dialogism of constructionism as well as an interest in the constructed meanings embedded in culture, a research direction reminiscent of critical theory via the critical consciousness of the researcher. Within the methodology of portraiture I have utilized interviews, personal narratives, and content analysis as methods for collecting and analyzing data. These methods were particularly useful in eliciting and examining aspects of writers’ experiences related to their construction of characters with disabilities as well as aspects of contemporary books that I have denoted as a frame for the portraiture.

Willis et al. (2008) define critically conscious research in a way that is applicable to this study, offering that in critical methodology, “critical consciousness underpins research methods; informs questions; guides data collection; and is applied in analysis, interpretation, and recommendations” (p. 50). The portraiture I have completed for this study reflects a critical consciousness in the way that it explores themes in literature about characters with disabilities while at the same time evoking the interpretive dimension of why and how such literature may be used in classrooms. In this way, I have employed Hitchcock’s (2008) perception of theory “as a pair of conceptual spectacles that you use to frame and focus on what you’re looking at...a tool for discerning,

deciphering, and making sense” (p. xi). A stance of critical consciousness thus supports my research methods, directing the manner in which I conducted interviews, examined the content of the children’s books used in this study, and reflected on my own storied life through personal narrative.

What makes a person critically conscious is the ability to challenge “the underlying assumptions that work in the internal and external worlds to privilege some while disprivileging others” (Willis et al., 2008, p. 5). Language and literacy researchers “who are critically conscious challenge barriers to social change, inequality, and democracy as they resist the reproduction of the ideas and values of privileged and dominant groups” (p. 13). This challenging of the status quo relates to Fairclough’s (1992) discussion of critical methods, where the word ‘critical’ implies “showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged” (p. 9).

In my study, the author portraits and the analysis of contemporary literature as well as the preparation of the annotated bibliography were completed through the cultivation of “multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same” (Greene, 1995, p. 16) with the stances Greene encourages through the vantage of ‘seeing things big’ and ‘seeing things small’ (p. 10) supported by my selection of variant lenses through the employment of Bakhtin’s (1981) chronotope as a lens. Identifying the point of view of the authors who participated in the study involved a close-up perspective while exploring trends and tendencies among books involved a panoramic optic.

My discussion of reflective connections between authors, texts, and classroom study approaches a way of addressing what Greene (1995) calls “an absence of imagination” (p. 37) in teachers and students who lack empathy. “If we can link imagination to our sense of possibility and our ability to respond to other human beings, can we link it to the making of community as well?” Greene asks (p. 38). The local spaces of contemporary children’s books, in this study, are thus offered as areas in which to expand and deepen experience through critical literacy practices. My shift back and forth between analysis and interpretation is directed at “the real mystique of qualitative inquiry” that “lies in the processes of *using* data rather than in the processes of *gathering* data” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 1).

Pilot Study: Rachna Gilmore

Background to the Pilot: Conversations with Jean Little

Personal communication with Canadian author Jean Little, during the fall of 2008, provided me with ideas about how conversations with authors might be initiated and how authors can become engaged in deeper reflections. The active interviewing style I developed at that time reflects a constructionist perspective on interview conversations within which the interview is a collaborative production where the respondent is a narrator or storyteller and the researcher is an active participant in the process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Such an active interviewing style differentiates between listening *to* a story and listening *for* a story, where “listening *for* them is something more acute...” (Welty, 1983, p. 14).

From Jean, I learned the need for a personal connection prior to open-ended questions and responses. Understandings of ways to develop and maintain

this connection evolved through my own sharing of stories and through my growing understanding of Jean's work. As I read and reread her autobiographical texts (Little, 1987, 1990), I began to ask more thought-provoking questions, approaching a perspective on why Holstein and Gubrium (1995) recommend a deep understanding of background knowledge within their model of the active interview. In addition, Holstein and Gubrium indicate that "citing shared experience is often a useful way of providing concrete referents on which inquiries and answers can focus" (p. 45), and the importance of sharing personal experiences became clear through practice in my conversations with Jean. Rather than a formal interview such as might be conducted by traditional newspaper journalism in order to "get the facts" (Altheide, 2002, p. 415), my conversations with Jean, framed by details of her published work and mine, became richer the more I listened *for* the stories that I trusted were there.

This practice of active interviewing corresponded to my developing ideas about portraiture and how "portraits are constructed, shaped, and drawn through the development of relationships" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997, p. 135). Considerations regarding active interviews also connected to the co-construction involved in portraiture methodology, for, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis (1997) state, "*Any* artful case study is not after the fact accidentally or incidentally a portrait" (p. 24). "The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997, p. 3).

As I began to link Jean's personal viewpoints about characters with disabilities to the findings of researchers engaged in this topic, I discovered distinct parallels between Jean's understandings of traditional literature about characters with disabilities and the work of R. G. Thomson (1997) and Keith (2001) who summarize depictions of characters with disabilities in classic texts as stereotypical renderings vastly unlike the portrayals of other characters. It was an attempt to include the experiences of her students and avoid stereotypes that prompted Jean's search for more realistic portrayals of characters with disabilities in books when she taught students with special needs (Little, 1987), much as I sought books for curricular inclusion in 2005—echoing primary characteristics of Freire's 'pedagogy of love' (1983; 1991; 1998). A preliminary literature review combined with insights that evolved from my discussions with Jean led me to believe that my initial research ideas about characters with disabilities in children's fiction was a viable topic.

In communicating with Jean through emails, phone conversations, and face-to-face discussions, I began to consider the nature of particular contexts for discourse and how these contexts affected depth of response. I also grew in confidence, believing that Jean was enjoying our conversations, as I was, and that she was finding the opportunity to talk about her work relevant to personal growth. I wondered whether what I had learned from the personal communication with Jean could be applied in reference to another author, and thus the pilot study with Rachna Gilmore was inspired. As much of my conversation about Jean's

writing offered information that is included in her two published autobiographies, a complete portrait of Jean was not considered for this dissertation.

Conversations with Rachna

Conversations by telephone and email were held with Rachna Gilmore during the winter of 2008/09 following University of Alberta Human Ethics Research approval for a pilot study. The ethics involved in the pilot study led to similar considerations in the research study, including the free and willing consent of participants as well as letters of introduction, information, and consent letters (Appendix A).

Field texts, a term for data collected in the field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), emerged from the pilot study in the form of field notes and transcripts. These field texts were rich, indicating further directions for conversations and providing an interview framework within which further research could be conducted. This framework reflected the potential of ‘language offerings’ (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 49), where, in the role of active interviewer, I made a specific vocabulary salient in terms of ‘counterstory’ and ‘chronotope.’ The sketches derived from these field texts were shared with Rachna Gilmore, modified or adapted according to her response, and then developed further into the portraiture included as part of the research text in this dissertation, again with Rachna’s assessment and approval prior to inclusion.

My first phone conversation with Rachna was tentative. At the appointed time, I dialled with trembling hands her long-distance number. Phone conversations have never been my preferred method of communication, as

without the medium of body language it's easy to mistake the message. When I was a child, and the telephone would ring in our house, I would do my best to escape the task of answering. What could be described as a mild telephone phobia has faded although I am left with a residue of uncertainty ascribed to telephone connections with people unfamiliar to me.

Rachna sounded rather uncertain in our initial conversation as well, and stated that she thought I would likely be disappointed in her response to one of the questions I had sent her ahead of time—a question about her process in creating characters with disabilities. She believed I might be critical of her choice to do the research after a character was created, rather than as a preliminary step. Our mutual anxiety about this first discussion relaxed into laughter, and I was delighted that we had established a good rapport for further conversations.

A number of interesting directions were evoked from this pilot study in terms of data analysis. Conceptualizations of the chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981) and the counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) emerged as metaphors regarding the writing processes of contemporary authors as well as lenses that served the content analysis of the collection of children's books I was examining. The pilot study with Rachna Gilmore identified that she was alert to certain commonalities of space-time, what Bakhtin refers to as a chronotope, in classic books about characters with disabilities. Rachna had noticed that these characters were generally either static, being eventually purged through death from the authentic world, or were developing miraculously towards a state of perfection in terms of a 'cure.' It appeared that this awareness of traditional depictions of characters with

special needs motivated Rachna's writing activities towards the development of counterstories offered against these dominant, socially influenced, metanarratives.

The pilot study was instrumental in its assurances that my initial research ideas were sound. The pilot also prepared me for ongoing conversations with the authors involved in the study, utilizing aspects of active interviewing techniques (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). As my ethics application allowed me to include data from the pilot study as part of my field texts and research texts, I have included data from the pilot, without differentiation, alongside other data in this study's portraiture.

Initial Exploration of Children's Books

While conducting the pilot study with Racha Gilmore, I was also exploring patterns and themes in an initial group of contemporary children's books that portray characters with disabilities. As preliminary reading, I located 17 Canadian fiction novels for children and young adults, published since 1995, in order to establish the process for content analysis (Berg, 2009; Merriam, 1998) used in this study. To begin what quickly became an onerous task, I searched 'children's literature' and 'disabilities' in *Global Books in Print* and added the titles I found to the growing list of titles I had previously encountered with the help of friends and colleagues. *Global Books in Print* does not differentiate between Canadian and other sources, and further library searches continually turned up non-fiction as well as fiction titles—aspects of the search that served to reinforce the need for an annotated bibliography that would be easily accessible to teachers.

Because of my book selection methods, I estimated that these 17 titles were generally representative of Canadian books in the field but knew that, prior to any generalizations, further work was needed with a larger sample. I also estimated that these titles were reflective of Radical Change theory (Dresang, 1999) in that they included perspectives not previously encountered in children's literature due to their inclusion of characters with disabilities. Other examples of 'changing perspectives' appeared in the titles where characters with disabilities were presented through their own first-person voices as well as through multiple perspectives—two aspects of Radical Change that are also compatible with elements of critical theory. In addition, the titles in the study sample reflected 'changing boundaries' through a complexity of characterization that took characters with disabilities beyond their static role as a plot device, a role commonly appearing in classic texts.

Within the 17 novels I studied, a number of themes emerged that I deemed important in terms of subcategories for analyzing the content of these books. These themes referred to the number of characters with disabilities in the sample of books, the position these characters played in the books (protagonist or subsidiary character), genre, point-of-view, type of disability, degree to which the disability was 'cured' in the story, family structure, self-image, and other character traits that emerged alongside the disability.

In summary, 20 characters with disabilities appeared in this initial group of books. Eight of the 17 books had main characters with disabilities, 2 books had both main and secondary characters with disabilities, and 7 books had secondary

rather than main characters with disabilities. Of these 17 novels, one had 3 characters with disabilities, and another had 2. From this initial study of books, I determined that further study was required within a larger sample, regarding, in particular, the family background of characters with disabilities and the self-images portrayed within the characterizations as well as the inclusion of particular gifts alongside a disability. If, I reasoned, modern authors are trying to ‘balance’ a disability with a particularly evident gift, it can be argued that writers are moving from one stereotype to another in terms of characterization. In addition, if authors see all female single-parent situations for these characters as positive, and the rare male single-parent situations as negative, that too may have implications about stereotypical thinking. I was also very interested in further explorations of genre, wondering whether fantasy was indeed ‘missing’ characters with disabilities altogether.

While many aspects of the portrayal of characters with disabilities in contemporary children’s fiction could have provided a focus of research, I determined that my work in this study in terms of categories for content analysis would specifically focus on time-space elements of characterization. As a lens through which to consider time and space, I employed Bakhtin’s (1981) conceptualization of the chronotope. Utilizing three categories borrowed from the field of narrative inquiry, I thus explored temporality, social context, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with respect to the contemporary body of work about characters with disabilities. This use of the chronotope allowed me a depth of analysis that took the study deeper into subcategories, not initially considered,

that included tense of narrative and setting. The analysis of the novels in my study sample was inductive in that new subcategories were invited to emerge throughout the study (Merriam, 1998) with respect to a consideration of ableism (Myers & Bersani, 2008; Rauscher & McClintock, 1997); these subcategories are further discussed in Chapter Four.

In addition to the examination of categories and subcategories, I also connected the data developed through the content analysis to elements of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999). These elements include changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries, discussed previously in Chapter Two. In this manner, I was able to explore how the sample texts figured alongside other titles indicative of Radical Change, and consider implications for classrooms related to their use.

Research Design *Research Questions*

There are two research questions directing this study:

1. What patterns in the depictions of characters with disabilities appear in the context of Canadian novels, published since 1995, for children and young adults?
2. What motivates and informs selected contemporary children's authors' construction of fictional characters with disabilities?

The research questions in this study have been addressed from “a social constructionist perspective that acknowledges the complexity of cultural, historical and social variables that influence writing” (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 17).

Implications regarding the methodology used in this study relate to the manner in which portraiture, as an adaptation of case study research, may affect readers, anticipating that “it is the direct policy implications of their research that sets those who do case studies apart from other qualitative researchers” (Lancy, 1993, p. 140). It is my hope that the manner in which my research questions have been addressed will impact curriculum-making and have direct influences on the creation and selection of classroom resources as well as their use. The manner in which the research questions have been addressed corresponded with the study’s underpinnings in critical theory where critically conscious research has implications for change within societies as well as within individuals.

Chapter Four thus addresses the first research question and explores, through content analysis, the patterns and themes in contemporary Canadian children’s novels about characters with disabilities. In a similar fashion, Chapter Five includes research texts that support a response to the second research question and that are presented as portraits of the two selected Canadian authors, Pamela Porter and Rachna Gilmore, as well as a self-portrait. Patterns and relationships between these portraits are offered in terms of an interpretive, comparative analysis in descriptive narrative form, and referred to as a ‘group portrait.’ Chapter Six contains the summary and implications of this study, and is connected to curricular considerations within a critically literacy approach. The organization of the implications with regard to critical literacy occurs with regard to the four dimensions framework proposed by Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002). In general, my stance for addressing the research questions acknowledges

how encounters with the arts “can awaken us to alternative possibilities of existing, of being human, of relating to others, of *being* other...” (Greene, 1993, p. 214).

Rigor, in the case of this study, is based on research methods that are “extremely systematic and have the ability to be reproduced by subsequent researchers” (Berg, 2009, p. 9). In this study, rigor also derives from the inclusion of my stance as a researcher, the nature of the interactions between me and my participating authors, and quotations from the rich, thick description that will result from the interviews (Merriam, 1998). The purpose in such thick description is “setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates...” (Geertz, 2003, p. 166).

Research Methods

Crotty (1998) identifies research methods as “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis” (p. 3). Within this qualitative study, content analysis (Berg, 2009; Merriam, 1998) was used to investigate patterns in Canadian, contemporary, published children’s books, and the research text in this regard appears in Chapter Four. The collection of 50 books was developed to include the 17 titles associated with my initial exploration of children’s books about characters with disabilities. My early quest for titles involved searches using the terms ‘children’s literature’ and ‘disabilities’ in *Global Books in Print*, after which I narrowed the sample by considering only those from Canadian publishers. The titles I acquired were added to the growing

list I had previously drawn with the help of friends and colleagues. Additional strategies used to locate titles included perusing Canadian publishers' catalogues with 'disability' as a target word, and making connections with experts in the field. Gillian O'Reilly, for example, Editor of *Canadian Children's Book News*, was a helpful source in this regard, as was Patti Kirk from Parentbooks (www.parentbooks.ca).

In addition to the above detective work, I emailed messages of inquiry to the marketing representatives of Canadian publishers (including: Fitzhenry & Whiteside/Red Deer Press, James Lorimer, Kids Can Press, HarperCollins, Orca Books, Penguin Canada, Scholastic Canada, Second Story Press, Stoddart Kids, Sumach Press, Tradewind Books, Random House, and Raincoast Books). In these messages to publishers, I summarized my project and requested further titles that might be pertinent. I also conducted various google searches with key words 'disability,' and 'children's fiction,' and 'Canadian author' as well as searched book reviews with the key word 'disability,' the most helpful source being the online *CM Magazine*. Finally, I combed through copies of book reviews I had written on a monthly basis, since 1996, for the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*. At the end of this process, I had 50 titles that fit my criteria: Canadian fiction novels, published between 1995 and 2009 (inclusive), for children and young adults, that portrayed characters with disabilities. I required that these characters be present within the texts themselves, and I eliminated titles such as Sarah Ellis' *Odd Man Out*, a book used in my pilot study but in which characters merely referenced another person with a disability.

Appendix D contains a list of the children's books in the study sample, and Appendix E contains an annotated bibliography of these titles; both appendices are intended to support educators through the identification of resources. While the focus books in this bibliography depict characters with disabilities, 'read-ons' in the style of McLeish (1990) are indicated to connect these focus books with other fiction novels useful in curricular explorations, offering a blended approach to literary studies rather than suggesting that books about characters with disabilities should be taught as an isolated unit or "ghettoized as 'disability literature'" (L. J. Davis, 2006b, p. xviii). In a similar vein, while the read-ons foreground Canadian literature, they also include quality titles from multiple sources including the United States, Britain, New Zealand, and Australia. The annotated bibliography thus becomes, to borrow a phrase from Madison (2003), "a performance of possibilities" (p. 472).

Portraiture (Lightfoot, 1983; Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997) is the method used to explore the second research question in the dissertation. I have thus used author portraits to present the influences that have informed the experience of writing about characters with disabilities. Chapter Five contains the portraits of two Canadian children's authors presented with introductions reminiscent of Meyer and O'Riordan's (1984) interviews with writers, including an initial paragraph regarding the interview situation followed by a general biography of each author. These portraits are followed by a self-portrait, constructed with attention to autoethnography (C. Ellis, 2004; C. Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) regarding the shaping of personal

narratives. A group-portrait is also included in Chapter Five, where common themes are drawn from the three author portraits. Chapter Five thus addresses the second research question in terms of the influences that have informed particular authors of contemporary children's fiction that presents characters with disabilities.

Decisions regarding the organization and content of chapters were made in consideration of the dissertation's balance. I chose to weight Chapter Four's discussion of the children's novels evenly with the portraiture presented in Chapter Five as well as the discussion of pedagogical implications of the study with regard to critical literacy in Chapter Six. Such weighting attends to the aesthetics of the dissertation as a whole and my desire to establish that answers to 'what,' 'why,' and, 'how' questions must be offered in positions relative to each other.

The content analysis and the portraiture were completed through an interpretive stance (Seidman, 2006), the benefits of which include a chance to utilize the rich, thick narrative of a descriptive study but, in addition, to use the data to develop conceptual categories, offering a deeper layer of understanding on a topic that has had sparse attention in previous research—one of the potential benefits of qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The results of the content analysis and the portraiture link to critical theory in Freire's (1983) concern with the "transforming power of words" (p. 57) as well as Fairclough's (1992) criticism of a conceptualization of "texts as finished

products” and the need for attention to “processes of text production and interpretation” (p. 2).

Portraiture

Lawrence- Lightfoot and J. H. Davis (1997) define portraiture as “a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience...portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image” (p. xv). Such a portrait reflects the goals of critical theory that underpin this study—namely dialogue and change relating to social justice.

With regard to her seminal work with portraiture, Lightfoot (1983) wanted to describe schools as “cultural organizations and uncover the implicit values that guided their structures and decision making” rather than creating “holistic case studies that would capture multi-dimensional contexts and intersecting processes” (p. 13). In a similar vein, I was interested in creating descriptions that would depict “motion and stopped time, history, and anticipated future” (p. 6) much as Lightfoot had done, linking authors’ decisions in creating characters with disabilities to social influences in my attempt to explore the second research question of the dissertation. I was not intent upon weighty case studies that would

overshadow the other elements of this study including the texts themselves and the classroom component of critical literacy.

I have thus approached the study of two authors, as well as the self-study, with a commitment to contextual descriptions of reality that acknowledge the shaping hand of the researcher in addition to the influences of the act of portraiture itself where “the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997, p. 85). As stated by Wolcott (1995) in relation to his conceptualization of fieldwork and the artistic approach that is needed, “Artists portray” (p. 15).

Portraiture has been described within the scope of case study research (Merriam, 1998) and, just as case studies specifically involve a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2003), so does portraiture offer choices in framing and focal point. While one trait of good case studies is identified as a grand scope that leads to deep inquiry (Yin, 2004), portraiture, in contrast, allows an even more focussed view that savours the depth of particular glances. In this study, my initial sketches in the form of field texts support research texts that are developed as author portraits. These portraits are based on coded field texts drawn from six primary conversations conducted with each of the two authors between fall, 2008 and fall, 2009. Through the collection and analysis of the field texts, I have made no concerted attempt at observation over time or attention to any changes over time.

My method thus resembles a “direct interpretation of the individual instance” (Stake, 1995, p. 74). In addition to these six primary conversations with each author, numerous other contacts were initiated regarding the perusal of transcripts and research texts, giving the authors involved in this study ongoing opportunities to co-construct the meanings that I was drawing from the data.

As portraiture has been discussed within the context of case study research, much from case study design applies to my work. Dyson and Genishi (2005) describe the value of a case, and remind researchers that “singular case studies do not aim to determine context-free associations” (p. 11) but that human interpretations on which people act do hold causality. “The goal is to practice sound research while capturing both a phenomenon (a real-life event) and its context (the natural setting),” ...addressing “‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about the real-life events” (Yin, 2004, p. xii).

The subjective responses of authors with regard to what has informed their work provide, in this study, a landscape for critical literacy where educators and students are assisted toward considering texts in a socially perceptive way. Educators reading this study will, I hope, remember and assimilate certain descriptions and assertions which will, in turn, affect curriculum making. “When the researcher’s narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings...feeding into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding” (Stake, 2003, p. 145). My goal in the inclusion of the author portraits is thus to encourage resonance as this study is read, where readers are inspired towards “a way of seeing one experience in terms

of another” (Conle, 1996, p. 299). Teachers may anticipate changes to classroom discussions in light of what the portraiture invites them to consider about authors writing about characters with disabilities. Curriculum developers may consider issues previously absent from teacher and student curriculum objectives as well as from student resources. All readers of this study may be prompted to explore, in diverse contexts, aspects of their own considerations of diversity.

All of the authors involved in the study have signed permission forms allowing their comments to be utilized, including my mother, whose storytelling formed a basis of my own early conceptualization of ability. Sketches from the field texts have been redrawn as research texts that present separate portraits of each of the two authors, Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter; these portraits are included, along with a portrait from my self-study, in Chapter Five. Also in Chapter Five is a group portrait, where lines are drawn connecting common themes among the three portraits. The comparisons in the group portrait arise from the data with regard to influences that have informed depictions of characters with disabilities; the comparison does not include comments on writing skill or style and is thus non-evaluative in nature, operating in conjunction with the ethics requirements of the study.

Self-Portraiture

While portraiture, as developed by Lightfoot (1983) and then further by Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis (1997), does not specifically address the art of self-portraiture, much of what applies to drawing the portraits of others applies to the self. “With portraiture, the person of the researcher—even when vigorously

controlled—is more evident and more visible than in any other research form. She is seen not only in defining the focus and field of inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, p. 13). A common goal of all types of portraiture is resonance, as in all cases the artist “seeks a portrayal that is believable, that makes sense, that causes that ‘click of recognition’” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, p. 247).

In my study, principles were adapted from autoethnography (C. Ellis, 2004; C. Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to further explore the shaping of personal narratives that eventually evolved into the self-portrait I have included. Initial plans regarding the dissertation did not include the self-study alongside the author portraits, although passages of personal narrative were anticipated within the introductory chapter. As the research progressed, however, the richness of the personal narrative, and the emergence of themes which related to lines in the developing portraits of Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter, prompted me to consider the inclusion of a self-portrait and then a group portrait comparing and contrasting elements of all three portraits.

“In personal narrative texts, authors become ‘I,’ readers become ‘you,’ subjects become ‘us’ “(C. Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 742). In the self-study, I took on the “dual identity” of academic and personal self (C. Ellis & Bochner, p. 740) in order to explore autobiographical stories about particular aspects of my experience. “Stories lived and told educate the self and others” (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi), and through the stories included in the self-study I have attempted to use personal narrative as a way of understanding experience and offering this understanding to readers of the dissertation.

As was the process for the other portraiture, field texts were composed, coded, and shaped into the research text of the self-portrait during the fall and winter of 2008-2009, although, in the case of the self-study, the field texts were composed entirely of personal narratives rather than a combination of field notes and transcripts. Through the production and analysis of the field texts, I have attended to the three-dimensional space identified as essential to narrative inquiry, considering time, place, and the personal-social plane (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My memories thus take me backwards and forwards, exploring the kitchen of my childhood and the boundaries I assigned students in an early classroom, as well as my relationship with my mother and the stories that have shaped my identity with respect to understanding diversity.

Annotated bibliography

As educators have been without a comprehensive Canadian bibliography of contemporary children's texts that depict characters with disabilities, I have followed patterns related to American work (Friedberg, Mullins, & Sukiennik, 1985; Friedberg, Mullins, & Sukiennik, 1992; Rasinski & Gillespie, 1992; Robertson, 1992) and developed an annotated bibliography that offers a perspective of the domestic landscape on which Canadian children's authors have been at work. In addition to providing an interpretation of the context within which contemporary authors are writing, reflecting aspects of both of my research

questions, this bibliography of the children's books identified by the study will also provide a resource for educators, assisting with classroom connections related to this study in terms of a "performance of possibilities," (Madison, 2003, p. 472).

By setting the interpretive portraits of authors within a frame of children's literature, it is anticipated that lessons learned from this research will contribute to the building of new knowledge, offering a landscape on which further studies as well as classroom curriculum may be designed. The role of portraiture, framed in children's texts, thus corresponds with a definition of case studies as important for initial inquiries where researchers and readers are able to formulate a picture of that which is studied (Kamil, 1984). It is my intention that the framed portraits included here will provide inspiration for ongoing work, a hope grounded in critical theory where learning that changes the individual inspires change on a grander scale.

Role of the Researcher

I have imagined my research role in this study as that of a portrait artist, deliberately selecting aspects of the lives of the two authors whose work I chose to explore in depth, as well as aspects of my own life, and presenting, in a frame of children's texts, the finished portraits to readers. In this way, I have approached both of my research questions by blending "the curiosity and detective work of a biographer, the literary aesthetic of a novelist, and the systematic scrutiny of a researcher" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997, p. 15). Displayed in relation to critical literacy, these portraits have the capacity to affect curriculum

development, and it is my hope that they will deepen ongoing conversations about diversity, both informing and inspiring the readers of this dissertation.

A number of elements of Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis's (1997) ideas regarding the role of the portraitist have been applied in this research context. I have attempted to bring "interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the collection of data" as an iterative and generative process (p. 185). The research stance moved from what Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis describe as "quiet watchfulness—where the portraitist is mostly taking in stimuli and listening carefully," experienced in my early reading and my conversations with authors, to "the more purposeful activities of initiating relationships with actors, scheduling interviews, and developing a plan of action" (p. 187).

In terms of assessing the portraits, I continually asked whether the portraits were authentic, and whether they would meet Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis's (1997) test of resonance with three audiences: would they have an authenticity with the authors who would see themselves reflected in the portraits, with the readers of this dissertation, and with me, whose "deep knowledge of the setting and self-critical stance" should allow me to recognize the value of the work (p. 247). In addition, I considered how the drawing of the study's contours was my responsibility, searching for what Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis call "the central story" (p. 12) and recognizing the boundaries of my relationship with the authors in that the focus of my work was on telling their stories, not on evaluating their writing processes or products.

When considering my research stance, I was aware that personal narratives are risky for the teller (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Langellier, 2003). In particular, I considered the impact of my writing on family members who were reflected in my self-portrait, taking great care to share pieces of writing with my mother, whose stories are central to my narrative. In this way, I addressed the vulnerability of authors of autoethnography as well as related ethical issues (C. Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Participants

Through conversations with Jean Little, I became assured of the richness available as authors discuss their work, and began to consider which authors I would select for my study. Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter are two Canadian authors who write about characters with disabilities. Both have won Governor General's Awards for their work; in fact, theirs are the only Governor General's Award winning books in the last twenty years prior to 2008 that have positioned characters with disabilities in leading roles (Brenna, 2008a). In choosing these authors as participants, I consciously involved individuals who have had considerable experience talking about their work and whom I believed would offer unique perspectives on the influences that have informed their portraits.

Ethics

In terms of the inclusion of two of my own published books as part of the discussion in Chapter Four as well as in the annotated bibliography, I have attempted to follow Keith's example (2001, p. 227) in objectively presenting my own fiction alongside the other titles I am reviewing. As my discussion of books

is descriptive rather than evaluative in nature, I considered the ethics in this regard as generally unproblematic.

I have subscribed to Zeller's (1995) advice regarding potential problems relating to the ethical treatments of participants as well as to the writer's self-absorption that Zeller indicates "may be solved in part by the qualitative researcher's normal process of mutual shaping—of providing for extensive review by respondents and other interested commentators" (p. 87). The two authors involved in this study were invited to respond to research texts as well as transcripts, and generously provided commentaries on the final products of the portraiture prior to any inclusion of their portraits in this study. The decision to share emergent and finished portraits with the authors and gain their approval prior to inclusion of these texts in the study is also based on the fact that due to the nature of their work, I will be identifying both authors by name rather than offering anonymity.

Data Collection Tools and Processes

Data collection tools included semi-structured, active interviews (Guthrie & Hall, 1984; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), personal narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; C. Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Langellier, 2003), and content analysis (Berg, 2009; Merriam, 1998). These tools supported the use of portraiture (Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997) to develop portraits of two authors as well as a self-portrait, and, in addition, utilized as the frame of these portraits Canadian children's novels that portray characters with disabilities.

In this way, the data collection tools addressed both of my research questions and offered a wide scope for exploration.

The field texts in this study were comprised of the transcriptions of the interviews and field notes regarding these interviews, my own personal narrative exploring elements that would lead towards the self-portrait, and the children's books in which I recorded my responses as 'commonplace books' by annotating the text with my responses: "underlining words or phrases, writing in the margins, pasting in Post-it notes" (Sumara, B. Davis, & Van Der Wey, 1998, p. 135). In addition, a chart of particular topic subcategories and results evolved throughout the exploration of the children's books. This chart provided a location for tallying particular items of interest as well as place to collect brief narrative notations (Appendix C), offering a concise field text with respect to the children's literature in the study sample.

Research texts are included in Chapter Four as summaries of 'literary chronotopic types' in terms of three characters from the children's books, as well as summaries of each category of interest, with respect to the children's books, utilizing the lens of Bakhtin's (1981) literary chronotope. Research texts also appear in Chapter Five as the portraits of two Canadian authors as well as a self-portrait. Chapter Six offers a summary of the research as well as implications of the study in terms of education pedagogy.

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviewing was chosen as the main tool for collecting data from the authors because the strength of in-depth interviewing is that "through it we can

come to understand the details of people's experience from their point of view" (Seidman, 2006, p. 130). Techniques I employed included empathetic listening (J. L. Ellis, 1998) and asking the participants to "tell me a story about what they are discussing" (Seidman, p. 87). Active interviewing practices emerged (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) that cast the interviewer as a participant in the process much as an artist is involved in creating a painted portrait.

In-depth interviews suited the primary goal of this study as I wanted to connect to the experiences of the authors involved here and deepen understandings of the issues these experiences reflect. My decision to use interviews was also shaped by Kincheloe's (1993) statement regarding the inability of teachers to "think about the curriculum outside of a social context" (p. 26). I hoped that the provision of background information regarding the writing of particular authors would assist me in better perceiving the "power dynamics" within particular texts (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 98). Such power dynamics relate to the manner in which characters with disabilities have been portrayed in past texts, how stereotypical portrayals have affected particular readers, and how these readers have made concerted efforts to consider "writing *otherwise*" (Grosz, 2003, p. 17) in their own fiction. In Porter's (2005) *The Crazy Man*, for example, history, influenced by stories Porter heard about the Weyburn Mental Institution, takes shape from the point of view of the future, offering glimpses in societal understanding towards mental illness that may not have been apparent during the time in which the novel takes place, invoking a "performance of possibilities" (Madison, 2003, p. 472) rather than a rigid outline of true events.

Probes, used to increase depth of response, included requests for the authors to further explain a point, to give me an example, and to take me through particular experiences in more detail (Bogdan & S. K. Biklen, 2007). In addition, I used models of my own stories, based on my mother's storytelling, to invite deeper reflections. For example, when Pamela Porter indicated that she had experienced first-hand prejudices against Blacks in the southern states, I invited her to share details of an actual event, just as I demonstrated my storied past through one of my mother's memories about "Johnny and the Pear"—a related tale about racial stereotyping.

Research based on in-depth interviewing is very time consuming, and involves careful organization of large amounts of data from the very beginning of its collection (Seidman, 2006). I transcribed the taped interview conversations in a timely manner after their occurrence, and kept field notes before and after each interview as well as employed an ongoing practice of coding the material. I transcribed all the interviews myself, as intonations and pauses during conversations offered opportunities for an understanding of emphasis that outside transcribers could miss, and then negotiated these transcriptions with the participants, who occasionally requested changes in wording. The purpose of these changes involved clarification of what was said during the interview situations and did not contradict any of the initial statements.

Personal Narrative

An exploration of my own conceptualization of ability and identity emerged as I wrote vignettes for a graduate course I was taking on narrative

inquiry. The instructor, Dr. D. Jean Clandinin, had prompted students to explore, in writing, stories that were important to their developing understandings as educators, and every narrative I composed highlighted aspects of my relationship with my mother through stories she had told during my growing up years and adulthood. I recall tremendous surprise as I surveyed the swelling pile of manuscript; I had not returned to university to write about my mom. However, these vignettes became increasingly pertinent to my topic of study, and the self-portrait that is drawn from them here through further considerations of technique with respect to autoethnography (C. Ellis, 2004; C. Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is, I believe, an evocative part of this dissertation. Stories lived and told are powerful in the manner in which they shape insight and action, and just as my mother's stories shaped my developing conceptualizations, stories in classrooms have wide potential for informing the actions of teachers and students.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a “careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (Berg, 2009, p. 338). The process of content analysis involves the “simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document's content” (Merriam, 1998, p.160). In his introduction to content analysis, Berg identifies that criteria of selection must be determined prior to the actual analysis of the data. In advance of my study, I differentiated between analysis that would rely on

the counting of particular textual elements and analysis that would emerge from narrative descriptions.

The categories researchers employ in content analysis can be determined deductively, inductively, or, in the case of my research at hand, by a combination of both inductive and deductive means (Berg, 2009; Merriam, 1998). In this study, three topics were originally identified with regard to the examination of contemporary children's novels about characters with disabilities: genre, family background of the target character, and self-image of the target character. Other dimensions on which to focus emerged through my reading and rereading of the selected books and are reported at length in Chapter Four as well as included in Appendix C.

Ideas regarding the content analysis in this dissertation evolved along with an understanding of Bakhtin's (1981) use of the 'chronotope' as a metaphor to explore time-space in literary fiction. Considerations of time and space in this study were specified according to the 'internal chronotopes' associated with characterization in the contemporary fiction novels, as discussed in Chapter Four, according to the 'external chronotopes' linked to the influences cited by authors as important with regard to their writing, as discussed in Chapter Five, and then further connected to the implications regarding critical literacy in Chapter Six.

My decision to employ Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of the chronotope to include categories borrowed from the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) allowed for specificity as well as breadth of analysis and discussion. Through an application of narrative inquiry's

three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I have examined aspects of temporality, social context, and place, as these three dimensions apply to the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ chronotopic lenses I have utilized. Through these lenses, I have afforded an indepth look at characters with disabilities in the selected contemporary novels as well as focusing the portraits of three of the authors who are portraying these characters.

Through content analysis employing the categories of temporality, social context, and place, I have explored numerical data related to particular subcategories as well as narrative descriptions of elements related to the children’s books in the sample. Appendix C illustrates the subcategories that have evolved to reflect temporality, social context, and place beyond the topics that initially arose from the pilot study. Regarding temporality, these subcategories include the ages of the characters with disabilities, the time period in which they reside, the time span of the story, the tense of the narration, and the chronology involved in the storytelling. In terms of social context, these subcategories reflect the numbers of characters with disabilities in each novel, the inclusion of particular gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic and religious differences alongside disability, the relationship of the disability to the book’s plot, whether or not the characters with disabilities are ‘cured’ or ‘killed’ within the narrative, the characters’ family situations, the point of view of the characterization, the intended audience of the novels, and the self-concept of the characters with disabilities. In terms of a sense of place, subcategories include the physical setting

of texts, the character's space in the novel as main character or secondary character, and the genre that dictates aspects of this space.

I further utilized aspects of narrative inquiry as a research approach when considering the adaptation of portraiture presented here in terms of the inclusion of my own self-portrait—an aspect of portraiture not covered by portraiture's previous proponents. As Coles (1989) states, "Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (p. 30). What from my mother's early landscapes causes me as a writer to negotiate disability issues within the context of book characters? How are my mother's stories reflective of my landscapes as a teacher? In what ways have the stories I have heard and experienced affected my understandings of 'curriculum commonplaces'—learner, milieu, teacher, and subject matter (Schwab, 1978)? These are questions I will return to in the self-portrait presented in Chapter Five. My attention to personal experience and story reflects narrative inquiry's attention to stories in the way that "People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones," educating the self and others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi).

The Interpretation of the Data

The Organization and Reduction of the Data

Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously in qualitative research for the purposes of "communicating understanding" (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). Strategies utilized in this study were directed towards the two research questions and included the development of field texts containing transcripts and field notes

regarding telephone, email, and in-person interviews, as well as personal narratives. Sketches from these field texts were organized towards the importance of easily retrievable data (Yin, 2004). Coding occurred during, as well as following, the interviews, as a method of acknowledging emerging themes and reducing the data to the sections deemed important for inclusion in the portraiture of the research texts. Sketching identifying information about the data directly onto the interview field texts, as well as adding notes about interpretive constructs related to ongoing analysis, was helpful in terms of the development of the portraits. In a similar fashion, recording notes regarding the selections of children's literature directly onto these texts, in an adaptation of Sumara, B. Davis, and Van Der Way's (1998) 'commonplace books,' turned the children's books into field texts that collected ongoing ideas of interest.

A combination of a tally sheet and an interpretive reading response journal was adapted in a response chart (Appendix C) that allowed a comparison of the books in the study sample across the subcategories that emerged in the study. In this way, I was able to uniformly calculate the numbers of books in which the specifics of certain subcategories dominated, such as particular genres or points of view, and this method of analysis assisted in summarizing the general frame of the books. Since interpretive readings are also recognized within content analysis as a more subjective method of producing data, my interpretations regarding the self-image of characters as well as setting—an aspect not easily quantifiable as many books contained considerable action and movement—could be included on this chart along with other less subjective aspects of textual analysis.

The Coding of the Data

Data reduction is the process of “selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in narrative field notes or transcriptions” and occurs “continuously throughout the life of any qualitatively oriented project” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Coding the data was ongoing, begun as soon as I had collected my first field text, and extending long after the last field text had been transcribed. Coding took place on the field texts themselves which were composed regarding conversations with the authors. Coding also occurred on written recordings of personal narratives as well as within the ‘commonplace books’ (Sumara, B. Davis, & Van Der Wey, 1998) and on the response chart (Appendix C) that evolved from the consideration of the children’s texts included in the study. Two types of coding occurred: records of what I considered to be important ideas, and records of recurring themes. Highlighted text, handwritten notes in the text margins, and coloured sticky notes comprised the physical format of the coded responses regarding the children’s books as well as the field texts regarding the portraiture. My coding of the data reflected the “ongoing interpretive role of the researcher... prominent in qualitative case study” (Stake, 1995, p. 43).

Through an exploration of the field texts, I attempted to reduce the data inductively rather than fit data into preconceived notions about influences on the selected authors. Similarly, interpretations of patterns among the contemporary children’s texts utilized inductive reasoning, although particular themes identified in the early group of books ordered the task of content analysis through deductive

means. By including a discussion of my personal interest in the subject matter of this study in the introductory chapter as well as the self-study, I have offered information that allows readers to identify factors related to my interpretation. In this way, I have attempted to identify the influences I may have had on the shaping of the portraits as well as on the ensuing analysis of texts and classroom suggestions.

Limitations of the Study

Case study research has been faulted for its lack of representativeness as well as a lack of rigor (Hamel, 1993), and it is reasonable to apply similar criticisms to portraiture. The manner in which data is collected and analyzed in this study implies findings that cannot be generalized outside the context of the three portraits. Instead, this study is designed to explore a particular phenomenon—influences to the construction of characters with disabilities—in the context of two individual participants as well as my own self-portrait.

Generalization with regard to this study is limited. The purpose of portraiture is not to provide cases that may be generalized to a wider population, but to offer the illumination of a unique experience, “hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, 1997, p. 14). This emphasis on identification corresponds with what Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis describe as the resonance readers may experience when perusing a novel. Through the narrative of portraiture, the universal may be rendered from the particular, allowing for meaningful learning through detail and authenticity.

In addition, generalization is not intended outside the study sample of the children's books. The 50 children's books are a group of texts collected in a particular time and space; with patterns and themes that resonate within the context of critical literacy. Themes related to these books are also important in terms of further research as well as curricular considerations.

The narrative descriptions in the author portraits reflect validity in that it is actually "*understanding*" that is sought through qualitative data (Wolcott, 1994, p. 367). I have thus offered careful attention to accurate and full recordings, diligent coding of responses, opportunities for readers to interpret responses for themselves, and ensured that the participants in the study had every opportunity to comment on and approve any material included on their behalf. Validity of responses from the participants in this study "derives not from their correspondence to meanings held within the respondent but from their ability to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 9).

As the interview responses are seen as products of interpretive practice, "all participants in an interview are inevitably implicated in meaning making" (Holstein & Gubrium, p. 18), a factor that negates bias as a meaningful concept. Criteria such as validity and bias applied to the portraiture are thus limited in scope by the very nature of the study itself.

In terms of the content analysis regarding the children's books that comprise the study sample, limitations may arise from my own performance as an insightful reader as well as the restrictiveness I have applied to book selection

occurring at a particular place and time. While I have ended up with a pleasantly neat number in the 50 titles of the sample, this number was not selected prior to the collection of the materials; as books were added to the group, and subtracted, the sample evolved from the 17 titles utilized in my initial exploration to a collection of books greater than 50 which was eventually reduced by the parameters I have identified regarding a working definition of the word ‘disability’ in this work and which is described in Chapter One. One criteria that excluded a number of possible titles involved the choice to utilize books where characters with disabilities were actually present, not merely referred to by other characters.

In a number of cases, the qualifying nature of particular books was blurred, as in my considerations of Alyxandra Harvey-Fitzhenry’s (2008) *Broken*, in which a minor character acknowledges, at the end of the book, an eating disorder. While I have accepted other titles with characters who have eating disorders within my framework of disability as chronic illness, the nature of the condition in *Broken* was such that it seemed potentially short-lived and temporary, thus this title was not accepted in my sample regarding characters with disabilities.

Another instance of a book considered, but not accepted, for the study sample was *Run* by Linda Aksomitis (2007). As this title was first published in New Zealand rather than Canada, I determined that it was sufficiently different in terms of publication details as to cause its exclusion. Both *Broken* and *Run* have, however, been included in the annotated bibliography as Read-ons for other titles,

as has *The Game* by Teresa Toten (2001). Toten's book is about a girl recovering from drug abuse and the effects of a deeply dysfunctional family; while there is research connecting emotional trauma to brain differences, and thus to disability, this is territory I have chosen not to cover within the framework of this study.

Summary

“Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art...an opportunity to see what others have not yet seen” (Stake, 1995, p. 136). Through a similar qualitative design, portraiture offers the opportunity to aesthetically provide readers with a glimpse into a subject as of yet primarily undiscovered. The critical methodology used in this research was selected for its adaptability towards crafting such a work of art, and for its capacity to present new information in ways that would inspire curricular discussion and change. By presenting the portraits in a frame of children's texts, I hoped to increase the resonance and classroom applications of the study, offering a rationale for why fiction about characters with disabilities is an important classroom resource, what Canadian fiction in this regard is available, and how it may be implemented within a critical literacy approach.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS—CHILDREN’S BOOKS

Introduction

Content analysis was used to explore patterns and trends in the study sample of contemporary Canadian novels, published since 1995, for children and young adults. The content analysis was accomplished through a qualitative exploration of a variety of subcategories delineated within the categories of time, social context, and place. This content analysis was particularly helpful in establishing points of comparison between and among books in addition to supporting the application of my data to Radical Change theory.

In an exploration of temporality, I examined a number of elements related to the characters and the stories in which they were presented. These elements included the ages of the characters with disabilities, the time period in which their stories take place, the time span addressed through the novels, the tenses of narration within these novels, and the chronology within the novels in which these characters are active.

In terms of social context, I explored the numbers of characters with disabilities in each text, the genders and particular ethnic cultures of the characters with disabilities as well as their religious differences, and whether or not the disability was ‘cured’ during the course of the story. I also looked at how many characters with disabilities died in the context of their books and examined the characters’ family situations—whether or not they came from one or two-

parent homes, and the gender of single-parents. In addition, I examined the narrative with respect to each character—whether or not they were presented from first-person or third-person point of view as well as the intended age range of the audience for each book.

When applied to conceptualizations of place within the sample texts, content analysis was helpful in examining the position of the characters with disabilities, expressly identifying the number of characters within the sample that occupied main or secondary roles. I also explored textual landscape through the identification of genre, noting the numbers of books in the sample that were realistic fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, or mystery.

In addition to counting particular elements of the texts in the study sample to facilitate an understanding of patterns and trends, I utilized narrative reflections within the category of social context as I explored the self-concept of the characters with disabilities. I also used narrative reflections to explore the relationship between the character's disability and the book's plot, eventually sorting these reflections into three general patterns: unrelated, somewhat related, and integrally related. In terms of an examination of place, I used narrative reflections to identify whether the stories' settings were urban or rural, fictional, ambiguous, or specified, and how many books had particular Canadian settings. Because of the number of settings within each text, some of them fleeting, it was difficult to obtain a clear numerical figure regarding the mention of places in these texts, but in addition to narrative descriptions I counted the number of texts

that employed Canadian settings as well as specific provinces that were mentioned.

The content analysis was initially based on a pilot study of 17 contemporary Canadian children's novels including 20 characters with disabilities. Of these 17 books, nine were realistic fiction and eight were historical fiction. Points of view varied, with characters being represented in their own voice, through the voice of another character, through a narrator's voice (both limited and omniscient), and sometimes through multiple voices in the course of the story. Eight of the 20 characters with disabilities were presented in their own first person voices, and, regarding these eight characters, five were also presented by third person narration. A total of 12 individual characters were presented through third person narration alone. Intriguingly, fantasy novels did not appear in this initial sample of books, a finding I thought was significant and worth further exploration in a larger group of texts.

Trends in this early sample were not apparent regarding the inclusion of particular disabilities, unlike the prevalence of polio and blindness in books published in the latter half of the 20th century, and disabilities mentioned in current texts ranged across the categories suggested in the definition of disability utilized by this study. In two of the novels, the disability was described but not specifically defined in terms of a medical diagnosis. Of the 20 characters depicted with disabilities, seven characters had orthopedic handicaps (including residual physical weakness from polio), three characters were blind, two had a cognitive disability, three had a mental illness, and four had a chronic illness (diabetes,

Crohn's disease, kidney failure, cancer). One other character had a severe learning disability.

In terms of the authors' ability to imagine a happy future for characters with disabilities, there was clear indication within this group of books that death is not the 'popular option' it once was, nor is the 'miracle cure' of a more traditional ending particularly prominent. One character out of the 20 was 'cured,' one was reported by his mother as cured, one had a stated potential for cure, six saw improvements to their condition, and one had negative societal perceptions lifted thereby reducing the stigma of 'disability.' In the 10 other cases, no cure was depicted or implied. Three of these latter characters died, and a fourth left town never to be seen again—a kind of death in fiction.

A brief examination of family structure in the 17 books initially studied offered interesting patterns. Although traditional two-parent families were the most common dynamic within this group of 17 books, with 10 of the 20 characters being raised by both parents, six were raised by single- parents, and four resided in unstated situations or more complex arrangements than could be addressed by a simple question regarding number of parents in the home. Only one of the single- parent families consisted of a male caregiver, and he was the only single-parent, of the six single - parent cases, depicted with negative parenting skills.

The self-image of the twenty characters varied somewhat within the books, with a negative self-image often appearing as one of the obstacles characters must overcome through the course of the story. Within this initial

group of books, two characters were depicted as unusually fine artists, one as a gifted storyteller, one as having a remarkably fine memory, three as physical champions, one as an exceptionally social person, one as an avid reader, one as academically talented, and one as a computer whiz. It was also interesting to note that one character mentioned positive outcomes of his fairly recent ‘disabling’ condition. Considerations of elements of time and space within this pilot study led me to Bakhtin’s (1981) use of the chronotope to conceptualize time-space within literary texts.

Bakhtin’s Chronotope

As I considered the patterns in the contemporary texts that were part of this study, and in the transcripts regarding authorial influences, I approached content analysis using a lens derived from Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of the chronotope. Bakhtin’s work involves a conceptualization of time-space in artistic and literary texts, using a metaphor borrowed from Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. Bakhtin suggests, for example, that Greek romances contain a particular rendering of the passage of time in order to allow the protagonists to have many panoramic adventures without aging. Such a rendering of time-space has been parodied by a number of writers including Voltaire, whom Bakhtin denotes as creating in *Candide* a depiction of characters who are so aged by the end of their adventures that they are hard-pressed to consummate the marriage that has been set up as a culmination of the plot.

The chronotope has been used by a number of researchers intent upon foregrounding particular influences on temporal and spatial relationships and

characterization. Burton (1996) identifies that applying Bakhtin's metaphor of the chronotope to novels will aid in critical reading. Ingemark (2006) explores how a particular element in fiction—enchantment—influences characters on a number of levels including perception, their sense of the body and its location in space, and personality. Simon (1997) establishes a link between fiction and history in a discussion of Rousseau's chronotopes regarding 'natural man.' Mackey (1991) discusses the chronotope in reference to Ramona Quimby, a character in children's fiction whom, Mackey argues, is positioned in time, place, and culture. McClay (2005) explores the chronotope of a parody she wrote in high school in the manner that it "recalls a formative moment in my own literate life, a moment of handmade literacy that represents my adolescent identity and self" (p. 87). Dresang and Kotrla (2009) discuss the chronotope as a conceptualization compatible with Radical Change theory.

In considering previous research that utilizes conceptualizations of the chronotope as a lens through which to explore literature, I focused on two themes in its usage that resonated with my research questions. The first theme involves the idea of a chronotope 'internal' to a piece of fiction in terms of the time-space related to characterization. The second theme involves the idea of a chronotope 'external' to a piece of fiction in terms of the time-space projections an author may consider as influential to the writing or the time-space projections a reader may derive in response to a text. The idea of a chronotope as a framework for exploring a time and space related to readers may be positioned within a critical literacy pedagogical approach.

I have thus utilized Bakhtin's conceptualization of the chronotope to offer a framework for both of my research questions. For the purpose of specificity I expressly refer to 'internal' and 'external' chronotopes within my analysis and discussion in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, the differentiation being that the former applies to considerations of time-space within the contemporary texts in terms of character development, and the latter applies to considerations of time-space outside the contemporary children's novels in terms of authorial influences and reader response.

In addition to these divisions, I further specified the discussion of time-space to include categories of narrative inquiry connected to the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I thus delineated the lenses of internal and external chronotopes using temporality, personal/social context, and place, applying these categories to characterization as well as to authorial influences whereby I attempted to capture elements of textual origins. In this way I have addressed Eisner's (1998) admonishment to 'see' rather than simply 'look,' the usage of the chronotope as a lens, focused by categories borrowed from narrative inquiry, allowing me the necessary depth and breadth of view to complete my analysis and discussion.

In this dissertation I have sifted what I perceive to be important patterns and trends, viewed through chronotopic lenses, within the study sample. It is these patterns and trends that I have offered in my discussion rather than the inclusion of the internal chronotopes of each individual text. The information is presented in three sections to foreground temporality, social context, and place—and

examined with respect to Greene's (1995) admonishment to see things 'small'—in terms of a panoramic view of elements of the contemporary Canadian children's books in the study sample.

Prior to this discussion of patterns and trends, I have provided an initial examination of the internal chronotopes related to three contrasting texts—Lawrence's (2006) *Gemini Summer*, McNicoll's (2006) *Beauty Returns*, and Waldorf's (2008) *Tripping*. A closer look at these three texts—what Greene (1995) refers to as seeing 'big'—illuminates the diversity within the study sample and builds background for further examination of these texts as 'literary chronotopic types' in terms of their pedagogical implications in Chapter Six.

Dopey, Kyle, and Rainey:

The Internal Chronotopes of Three Characters from Contemporary Texts

A comparison of the internal chronotopes of Dopey in Lawrence's (2006) *Gemini Summer*, Kyle in McNicoll's (2006) *Beauty Returns*, and Rainey in Waldorf's (2008) *Tripping*, offers three distinctly different renditions of characters in time and space. Dopey stands in his text like a metaphorical villain; Kyle moves towards independence yet the performativity of his situation disallows complete self-actualization; Rainey appears as a forward moving embodiment of able disablement.

Such an examination of each character in chronotopic terms offers an indepth look at their unique paths as well as the patterns within their respective texts. This form of inquiry offers the opportunity for educators to consider these

characters as ‘literary chronotopic types’ a phrase I have adapted to represent key characters who encourage insight into other texts in comparison with their own.

Dopey

Dopey Colvig in Lawrence’s (2006) intermediate historical fiction novel *Gemini Summer*, a work that demonstrates traits of magic realism through a combination of fairy tale elements and realistic description, is depicted in the third person by an omniscient narrator—a narrator who has the potential to offer a broad spectrum of information about Dopey, particularly as the narrative sweeps across a period of years. The characterization, however, is generally restricted to descriptions of physical traits and then the negative actions with which Dopey is associated.

Described as a young boy “too stupid to go to school” (Lawrence, 2006, p. 13), Dopey’s character is performative of past stereotypes related to people with disabilities who, at one time in Canada, were not included in public education. Furthermore, Dopey’s internal chronotope as a secondary character within this text unfolds through the generalization of physical traits to moral traits. As in fairy tales, Dopey’s atypical appearance—his large head, his grunting and growling, his violent yet psychologically unexplained actions—results in his manifestation as the book’s villain. Dopey’s characterization is further explored in the author’s acknowledgements, where a brief reflection is provided on a “kid like Dopey” (p. 259) who attacked the child Lawrence, in real life Hog’s Hollow, with a broken rector’s sign, much as Dopey attacks Danny in the novel.

Without the discussion of the real life inspiration for Dopey, it might be possible to derive a more sympathetic understanding of the character of Dopey within the text. Two particular interpretations of the story are offered here to illuminate this. An initial interpretation involves the consideration of Dopey as a metaphor, his character suitably locked within the fairy tale genre. A secondary and more complex reading suggests a chance for Dopey to become more than a simple villain in the story. The acknowledgement that the author has known a character 'just like Dopey' in real life becomes an obstacle to both readings. Readers are left with a character worth examining for his perpetuation of past stereotypes about people with differences although, as I discuss further in Chapter Six, the performativity of this text may prevent independent critical thinking with regard to Dopey's character as demonstrated in book reviews regarding *Gemini Summer* (Bloom, 2006; Bryan, 2006; Bush, 2006; Huntley, 2006; Mouttet, 2007; M. Snyder, 2007).

A reliance on fairy tale mythology underpins the description of Dopey as an irredeemably evil character who lurks like a troll on the paths through the cottonwoods, waiting to attack Danny. A reader's performative interpretation of this stereotypical character may not recognize the incongruity of such a stock character in fiction where most other characters are presented realistically. The character of Dopey, seen as indomitably wicked, is static in time and place, so completely immovable as to operate cleanly as a plot device, the obstacle that must be gotten rid of in return for a happy ending. As such, Dopey is bound

within his genre, completing his job with the economy derived from the predictability of his circumstances.

The author's entry in the acknowledgements section regarding Lawrence's own childhood, however, draws the fairy tale out of its genre and into the author's personal reality. "As a child in Toronto I often rode a bus through Hog's Hollow...where Danny lives, in a neighbourhood pieced together from places and people I used to know, including a man like Creepy, who made me crawl around on the street to pick up the bits of a broken bottle, and a kid like Dopey, who attacked me with a realtor's sign" (Lawrence, 2006, p. 259). Lawrence is here confiding that he knew a 'kid like Dopey' but the boy he describes in *Gemini Summer* is merely a metaphor for evil rather than a real child. Tensions arise for readers considering the ramifications of Lawrence's statement about knowing 'a kid like Dopey.'

As the character of Dopey moves out of the constricted circumstances of the story and into a depiction of a character that any reader could meet anywhere, no longer are his circumstances predictive of the economy of characterization that signifies a simple fairy tale villain. Readers recognizing this contextual shift may be troubled by the incongruity it creates between the idea of Dopey as a stock character and the idea of Dopey as a real child. It is possible, however, that stereotyping in Dopey's regard will not be recognized due to the performativity of his character with respect to commonplace texts. It is also unlikely that children reading the book will peruse the acknowledgements section, and, even if they do,

just as unlikely that they will deconstruct a characterization that has left them untroubled.

A secondary and alternative reading allows for the internal chronotope of Dopey to resonate in relation to the factors surrounding Beau's death. Until that event, readers have not been granted any opportunity for sympathy on Dopey's behalf. But quite suddenly at the book's close, as Dopey is discovered to have "killed" Beau, the work of repressing the monster is at hand: yet Danny suddenly feels sorry for Dopey's father, Creepy, who tries to stand up for his son. "He didn't mean nothing that day. He wouldn't have known what he was doing," says Creepy (p. 255), and the events of Beau's death are suddenly and for the first time clear in Danny's mind. "It was an accident," Danny says, although the rest of the story continues to implicate Dopey, and many readers will continue to blame Dopey for Beau's death. And, just as quickly as the past is clear to Danny, the Colvig family moves away; the monster in the Hollow is finally gone for good.

This second reading implies a widening of Dopey's character in Danny's mind and involves the fact that Dopey's father does indeed care about him. Inherent in this section is a revelation: that Danny has been released from a monster of his own—the possibility that he himself is to blame for his brother's death. This assuagement of Danny's guilt offers the potential for Dopey to shift from villain to rescuer. Through Dopey's involvement in Beau's death, albeit accidental involvement, he has rescued Danny from the thought that he himself was to blame for his brother's fall. Yet no further reflections on the initial

blaming of Dopey are offered, and no widening of the lens occurs through which a reader might see Dopey, and his accusers, from a clearer angle.

The internal chronotope of Dopey is an interesting one to compare to chronotopes within other works. It becomes an apt metaphor to apply to other characters where a static semblance of time or space is represented, and a way in which a reader might see more clearly the workings of a traditional fairy tale genre resonating in contemporary fiction. Because Dopey's qualities are so clearly rendered, he offers a powerful way to understand the service of a character towards a story's plot, and a way to open an interrogation of multiple viewpoints on the basis of the lack of sympathy he garners due to the manner in which he is depicted.

Kyle

McNicoll's (2006) characterization of Kyle, a main character of senior high school age appearing in the realistic fiction young adult novel *Beauty Returns*, offers a portrayal of a protagonist both reflective of, and in contrast to, historical "kill or cure" trends in classic fiction where authors were unable to imagine a happy future for characters with disabilities. Kyle, one of two primary characters in this novel, is given space and time within the book to grow and develop, and, although his mother is somewhat overprotective, he is supported by two parents within a positive social context, a context which contrasts with disability stereotypes and his eventual demise. Predictive of his unhappy ending, however, is Kyle's own personal inability to resolve issues associated with his blindness, an element of the story that resonates with past stereotypes regarding

characters with disabilities and juxtaposes with Kyle's otherwise socially positive depiction.

It is Kyle's definite momentum as a protagonist that provides tension with his health-related death at the end of the story, a tension that may jar readers to consider the mixed messages they are receiving from Kyle's own chronotope in *Beauty Returns*. Kyle's internal chronotope involves a characterization offered in both first-person and third-person point of view in a chronological, present tense text. This textual space that is offered to Kyle is powerful in the manner in which it depicts Kyle as a viable, strong present-day protagonist who is capable of telling his own story. In addition to contextualizing his own story in particular detail, albeit in an ambiguous setting that is not markedly Canadian, this space invites Kyle to manifest primary themes within the story of another character, offering a dual richness with respect to his role within the novel.

That Kyle's storyline occurs across a period of months allows him time to initiate and sustain the kind of growth and development often denied characters with disabilities in past texts. In opposition to the gains he makes as an individual within the novel, Kyle's own personal inability to resolve issues associated with his blindness presents a formidable barrier to his future happiness and is, in retrospect, somewhat predictive of his eventual fate: death as an alternative to the happy future he cannot actualize in real life. That his death occurs as a result of a pre-existing yet undiscovered heart condition is an interesting element to consider alongside the high number of traditional texts where disabilities were

ambiguously presented to serve the plot, inserted into the storyline to underpin a character's demise or miraculous cure.

The internal chronotope of Kyle in *Beauty Returns* thus demonstrates factors related to time and space that work in opposition to each other; he moves forward, physically and psychologically, yet in the end he is subjected to a painful and unnecessary death. In this way, Kyle performs as a citation of more stereotypical characters within a characterization that disrupts common stereotypes. Kyle's journey is circuitous in the manner that he moves forwards and backwards, struggling with self-loathing because of his circumstances, yet prompting a look at the richness to be explored within the context of disability, reporting that, since his blindness, "the rest of my senses seem hungrier" (McNicoll, 2006, p. 76). Kyle's character, rather than being a static, cardboard depiction of a blind person, works towards a representation of an individual that grows and develops, encouraging readers to examine the troubling circumstances of the sudden death that is employed as a plot device.

Rainey

The characterization of Rainey in Waldorf's (2008) young adult novel *Tripping* offers yet another type of internal chronotope. Presented through her own first-person narrative, she appears as a character very much in control of her own destiny, making decisions, within the context of a summer cross-Canada youth tour, that allow her to change and grow. As the book commences, Rainey is struggling with after-graduation plans and the potential for a relationship with the mother who abandoned her. At first determined to remain free of romantic

involvements, Rainey eventually launches into a deepening friendship with Alain that offers love and support. The fact that Rainey wears a prosthetic leg does not affect her self-concept, and disability appears as merely part of her characterization, not an impediment to her self-worth or happiness. She is so comfortable with her physicality that at one point in the story she takes off her Flexileg and hands it to a lecherous and drunken would-be admirer as both a turn-off and a joke.

The novel is chronological, narrated by Rainey in the past tense as if told from a stance ambiguously beyond the events that she is about to divulge. Time unfolds haphazardly, according to incident, sometimes moment by moment, and sometimes skipping a lengthy span of time. Through personal narrative, Rainey herself picks out the key incidents to explore.

Rainey's family circumstances are fluid and changing within the novel. Raised by her father since her mother abandoned the family, she now lives with Greg and her stepmother, Lynda. A difficult meeting with her birth mother during the course of the story offers a wider view of the past as well as a younger brother Rainey did not know she had. Disparaging remarks from her father about a future in art has caused her to consider other avenues for further education, but during the trip she considers what she really values in life and the book ends with a brief yet euphoric decision: "I'm going to paint" (Waldorf, 2008, p. 342).

Commencing in Toronto, Ontario, the storyline moves twelve thousand kilometres, through choice Canadian sites, to conclude the trip in Vancouver Island. Descriptions of Rainey's mobility are varied, and often include vivid

perspectives on her unique style of travel: “Flabbergasted at her presence, I scooted gracelessly across the land like a three-legged spider. I hiked myself up onto the log on Lynda’s other side. ‘What are you doing here?’ I asked, wondering if I was having some sort of sun-induced hallucination” (Waldorf, 2008, p. 321).

Through *Tripping*, Rainey’s internal chronotope disrupts commonplaces of contemporary and classic texts. Rainey’s internal chronotope positions her character in contrast to other characters with disabilities in many contemporary books, offering an example of how a disability can operate independently of a story’s plot. Her internal chronotope also demonstrates that a character with a disability can move authoritatively, as a protagonist, through time and space, a chronotope uncommon for characters with disabilities in classic texts. Rainey’s chronotope thus compares and contrasts with the chronotopes of Kyle and Dopey, offering three distinct versions of characters in time and space.

Dopey, Kyle, and Rainey as ‘Literary Chronotopic Types’

Dopey is developed as a static character employed as a plot device within an intermediate historical fiction novel that performs largely as a fairy tale. Kyle is established circuitously through performative young adult realistic fiction that operates as a citation of traditional texts alongside a consciousness of the textual requirements of self-actualizing, contemporary characters. Rainey, also a character in young adult realistic fiction, is created with disability as only one of a number of character traits rendered independently of the story’s plot, her forward motion across place and time an enactment of coming-of-age. The ‘literary

chronotopic types' of these three characters, when examined fully, offer useful lenses that can be applied to other texts as well as to goals of critical literacy. These goals include disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints, two dimensions of critical literacy discussed by Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002).

Radical Change In *Gemini Summer*, *Beauty Returns*, and *Tripping*

A brief look at Radical Change characteristics in these three novels involves attention to the types of Radical Change previously outlined by Dresang (1999): 'changing forms and formats,' 'changing perspectives,' and 'changing boundaries'. *Gemini Summer* offers elements of 'changing boundaries' in the way that magic realism portrays a reincarnation of Danny's deceased brother as a dog. The character of Beau is thus presented in a new and complex way, allowing readers to deal with the tragedy of his death through a more hopeful narrative. *Beauty Returns* and *Tripping* offer different elements of 'changing boundaries' in that these text deals with teen sexuality—a subject previously forbidden. These two novels also deal with elements of 'changing perspectives' in the manner in which they present previously unheard voices through the perspectives of youth with disabilities who speak for themselves through first-person characterizations. *Beauty Returns* also presents another element of 'changing perspectives' through its employment of the multiple verbal perspectives of two narrators, telling their stories in alternating chapters.

While these three books to some degree represent 'disrupting the commonplace,' one of the dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van

Sluys, 2002), through ‘changing perspectives’ and ‘changing boundaries,’ they do not reflect another type of Radical Change: ‘changing forms and formats.’ They are, in fact, characteristic of most of the books in this study sample in their use of sequential and linear organization and format. It is interesting to note that the novels in the study sample do not demonstrate a great variety of Radical Change characteristics, and that the common denominator of these novels in terms of Radical Change is simply their inclusion of characters with disabilities along with the realistic treatment of these characters as people rather than ‘using’ them as plot devices.

Patterns and Trends Regarding Internal Chronotopes in the Sample Texts:

Temporality

The manner in which the internal chronotopes within the children’s novels reflect aspects of temporality is varied, although a few patterns appear worth consideration. This section will use charts to identify patterns and trends related to the ages of the 64 characters in the study sample, the time period in which the characters reside, the time span of the story, the tense of the story, and discuss in relation to narration the chronological components of these texts. While there is variation with respect to temporality in this sample of texts, these books are generally not reflective of Radical Change characteristics involving nonlinear or nonsequential readings.

Temporality: Character’s Age					
n=64					
Birth-Age	Elementary School Age (grades 1 – 8)	High School Age (grades 9 – 12)	Adult	Senior Citizen	Ambiguous Age
5	16	27	14	1	2

As specified in the previous chart, an examination of the ages of the 64 characters in the sample offers that almost half of the characters with disabilities within the study sample are of high school age. This pattern is interesting as it does not reflect a societal trend; there are more people with disabilities who are

senior citizens than in any other age group. It is possible that authors are selecting characters that are representative of readers' ages. That characters of high school of readers' ages. That characters of high school ages or older are portrayed within books intended for younger readers may indicate that authors are aware that children prefer to read about characters slightly older than themselves; it may also indicate a desire to 'protect' younger characters from disabilities in terms of their fictional lives, however there is not enough data in this study to justify this conclusion.

Temporality: Time Period of Setting			
n=50			
Past	Present	Future	Ambiguous
14	19	0	17

As the above chart shows, there is a fairly even distribution of books set in the past, the present, and ambiguous settings. It is important to add that many of the books set in the present have some involvement with past times in the characters' lives, whether through flashbacks, memoir, or other storytelling devices. In addition, the four time slip books have large sections recounted in the past that are not tallied here. It is interesting to note that none of the books in the study sample involve futuristic settings, avoiding another element of Radical Change that involves changing boundaries through the depiction of new types of communities.

Temporality: Time Span of Novels			
n=50			
Days	Weeks	Months	Years
6	13	22	9

As demonstrated by the previous chart, most of the novels in the study sample occur across a period of months, offering a lengthy span of time through which characters may grow and develop. It is interesting to note that in the novels that take place across a time span of days, there is no conclusive evidence that this shorter time span affects the ability of the target character to learn and grow. Some of the characters with disabilities whose associated texts occur across a period of days, such as Aaliyah in Stevenson's (2008) *Big Guy*, and Natasha in Brenna's (2007) *The Moon Children*, make significant life choices. These characters appear in contrast to the very static characters in classic texts where time seems not to impact their lives.

Temporality: Tense of Story			
n=50			
Past Tense	Present Tense	Future Tense	Mixed Tense (Past and Present)
36	4	0	10

As the previous chart indicates, the novels in the study sample primarily adhere to past tense frames for their narrative, and most of these generally follow a chronological framework. A few books shift between present and past tense narration, offering alternating chapters that reflect different time periods or using flashbacks to take the story to initial beginnings. Because some of this shifting in terms of backstory isn't clearly 'setting' the story in the past, a judgement on whether the framework is chronological or not is rather blurred, however when in doubt I listed the tenses as 'mixed.'

Just as the books in this study sample do not reflect Radical Change characteristics in terms of futuristic settings, they also do not include aspects of narrative invention that go beyond traditional patterns. The brief appearance of metafiction, for example, occurring in Lekich's (2002) *The Loser's Club*, as well as in Choyce's (2004) *Smoke and Mirrors*, as characters speak directly to the reader (in the latter) or shift between first and third person narration (in the former) is a reminder of general lack of metafictional elements in this body of work.

In terms of a definitive internal chronotope related to temporality in this study sample, it is reasonable to suggest that preference is given to characters with disabilities who are of high school ages, within stories that reference present and past landscapes to the exclusion of futuristic settings. The plots involved in these novels tend to sweep across a period of months, rather than weeks, years, or days, and the past tense appears as the preferred way for accomplishing the narration.

Patterns and Trends Regarding Internal Chronotopes in the Sample Texts:

Social Context

The social context in which characters are presented formulates further an understanding of the internal chronotope represented by this sample of texts.

Using this lens I explored individual differences in terms of numbers of characters with disabilities within each novel, as well as gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic and religious differences within the characterizations. I also identified the relationship of the character's disability to the plot, whether characters were 'cured' or 'killed' in the course of the story, the character's self-concept and family situation, as well as the point of view and intended audience of the story

The following charts identify particular characteristics of this social context among the texts, and offer comparative details in regarding numbers of characters with disabilities within each novel, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic or religious differences.

Social Context: Numbers of Characters with Disabilities Within Each Novel				
n=50				
1 Character	2 Characters	3 Characters	4 Characters	5 Characters
42	5	1	1	1

Social Context: Other Differences Within Characterization					
n=64					
Gender Differences		Sexual Orientation		Ethnic/Religious Background	
male	female	homosexual	heterosexual (unspecified or implied)	specified ethnicity and/or religious differences	unspecified ethnicity (implied White Anglo-Saxon)
32	32	0	64	6	58

As the two previous charts demonstrate, most books in this sample depict only single characters with disabilities. An identical number of male and female characters with disabilities are included in these novels, offering equity in terms of gender differences. Where equity breaks down is with descriptions of characters' sexuality, ethnic, and religious differences. Portrayals of all 64 characters with disabilities involve heterosexual or undescribed sexual preferences and generally mainstream descriptions in terms of skin colour and ethnic background. Of the 64 characters, there are references to six ethnic or religious groups in their regard, offering minimal ethnic and religious diversity within the study sample, thereby avoiding a broader view of Radical Change characteristics with respect to multiple perspectives within the scope of characters with disabilities. In terms of specific references, one character has an Armenian grandmother; one is an immigrant to Canada from Romania; one is English and

lives in England; one has a sister described as ‘native’ with his own ethnic background uncertain; one is identified as Mennonite; one is from a Greek family.

A few other characters in some of these novels, albeit characters without disabilities, do represent alternatives in terms of sexuality and ethnic diversity. While this trend has not been examined in detail within the scope of this study, books such as Stevenson’s (2008) *Big Guy* and Aker’s (2007) *The Space Between* involve main and secondary characters without disabilities who are homosexual, and Minaki’s *Zoe’s Extraordinary Holiday Adventures* (2007) also includes representations of minor characters outside white culture. This study sample, however, contains fewer than expected differences in terms of characterization, and other than the Radical Change element of ‘previously unheard voices’ in terms of disability, falls short of the inclusion of other types of diversity.

Social Context: Relationship of Character’s Disability to Plot		
n=50		
Unrelated	Somewhat Related	Integrally Related
7	8	35

As the above chart shows, most of the books in the study sample involve the characters’ disabilities as integral to the plot, although this interpretation of the texts is subjectively based on my own personal reflections and responses to the novels. In the 35 cases noted above, the disability appeared to be inseparable from the main plot line. It is interesting to note that all six titles involving eating

disorders are primarily issues-based books, with plots tied to the character's disability, although one of these titles—Skrypuch's (1999) *The Hunger*—has a sub-plot involving the Armenian genocide which in some respects stands on its own. In contrast to the common tendency of connecting a character's disability to the plot of a book, the 'kill or cure' mentality of authors of classic texts seems does not appear to bear much weight within this contemporary sample of texts.

Social Context: Cure, Heightened Acceptance by Society, Death, or Disappearance			
n=64			
Cure	Heightened Acceptance by Society	Death	Disappearance
2	2	6	1

As the above chart indicates, only two of the 64 characters in the study sample are 'cured' during the course of the story although another six—all of the characters with eating disorders—are headed towards a cure by the end of their texts while an additional character with an eating disorder reports herself as 'cured.' In an alternative view of a 'cure,' two characters are seen as more accepted by society, a kind of alleviation of disablement. Within this study sample, six characters with disabilities die and one leaves town never to be seen again—as already noted, a kind of death in fiction.

The issue of a character's self-concept is more difficult to quantify. Through qualitative analysis, I ascertained that, of the 64 characters examined, 20 appear to have a negative self-concept although in 11 of these cases, their self-

concept improves as the story progresses. Important to note is that nine of the titles involving negative self-concepts also include eating disorders or other mental illnesses where inaccurate self-image is part of the disability.

Social Context: Family Situation		
n=64		
Two-Parent Homes	Single-Parent Homes	Other
27	16	2 (aunts) *19 live in unstated or not applicable arrangements

As the previous chart depicts, there is minimal range in terms of family structures. Most of the characters with disabilities live in standard two-parent home situations, and all of these couples reflect heterosexual pairings. Of the single-parent households, it is interesting to note that fourteen out of the 16 single parents are mothers and only two of the 16 are fathers; in addition, all but two of the females who are single caregivers (a total of 16 aunts and mothers) are depicted in positive terms with regard to parenting. Twig’s mother, Angel, is depicted as a negative caregiver in Little’s (2000) *Willow and Twig*, based on Angel’s drug addiction and preference for a party lifestyle as well as her neglect of the children; there are brief scenes, however, that show an alternative side of Angel as a warm caregiver. In a similar manner, Tommy’s mother, Cat (Holeman, 2002), is presented as a woman whose addictions engineer both her downfall and

Tommy's. Neither of the two single-parent fathers are depicted as positive caregivers although both demonstrate some loyalty to their sons.

Social Context: Point of View of Characterization	
n=64	
First-Person Point of View	Third-Person Point of View
13	51

Social Context: Intended Audience of Novels		
n=50		
Junior Fiction (ages 8 and up)	Intermediate Fiction (ages 11 and up)	Young Adult Fiction (ages 14 and up)
3	23	24

Further information regarding the internal chronotopes within these novels as they reflect social context can be gleaned from a look at narration and intended audience as depicted in the two previous charts. While most of the characters are presented by third-person narration—either directly through the voice of a narrator or from the perspective of another character in the novel—about a fifth of the characters are depicted primarily through their own first-person voices. This first-person stance offers a range of motion to the characters and seems reflective of an opportunity to represent previously absent perspectives in children's books. Quite striking is the generally even distribution of books between the young adult

and intermediate target age groups, with a distinct absence of books for the junior market. It is possible that authors do not want to include disability in books for young age groups as a method of ‘protecting’ children from negative themes; however such a conclusion—disheartening as it is in a world where these same young children encounter disability in themselves and others—requires further research if it is to be substantiated. The lack of books for a junior audience about characters with disabilities can also be explored as an element of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999) that is lacking in this sample, marginalizing a group of people by denying them access.

In terms of a definitive internal chronotope related to the social context of the characters with disabilities in this study sample, it is reasonable to suggest that one character with disabilities is generally portrayed to the exclusion of other characters with disabilities, and, when a disability is presented, it is generally done so for the purpose of developing the plot. Past trends related to authors who killed or cured characters with disabilities are not apparent in this study sample, although the death of six characters here may warrant further attention.

While negative self-concepts do not seem to be foregrounded as they once were, family situations require further consideration: that single mothers and single fathers are represented with contrasting degrees of positivity may be of import, again, not reflecting the diversity attributed to Radical Change. In addition, the presentation of 13 characters through their own first-person voices is a significant aspect of the internal chronotope related to social context; that these characters are strong enough to tell their own stories may bode well for future

growth in this area and is an element of Radical Change that is demonstrated by this study sample. With respect to the absence of titles involving characters with disabilities for younger age groups, consideration of disability as an issue that can affect anyone is certainly an area worth ongoing research. It would be interesting to examine picture-books for their inclusion of characters with special needs as further study in this area.

Patterns and Trends Regarding Internal Chronotopes in the Sample Texts:

Place

The manner in which the internal chronotopes within the novels reflect aspects of place is also varied, although patterns are discussed in this section that are certainly worthy of identification. When considering ‘place’ among the texts at hand, my exploration considered the physical settings of texts—urban and rural, real and fictional, whether texts were specifically presented in Canadian locales, and whether multiple settings were included. In addition to the physical setting, I also explored a number of other factors related to place, including the character’s space in the novel—whether the character operated as a main character or a secondary character, and the genre that dictated aspects of this space.

Among the texts that were part of the study sample there is a mix of settings between urban and rural, where rural includes farms, small towns, resorts and forests. No single context—urban or rural—appears dominant in the study sample. Similarly, there is a mix of texts that utilize Canada as an internal setting alongside texts that involve ambiguous settings. Only one text is exclusively set

outside Canada—Holeman’s (2002) *Search of the Moon King’s Daughter*, which takes place in England. While numerous texts involve multiple settings, there are at least 27 texts that refer to Canada within their physical landscape. This specificity with regard to Canadian locations may be attributed to Radical Change (Dresang, 1999) in that Radical Change offers settings that may have been previously overlooked in children’s fiction. The following chart includes a breakdown of the Canadian settings although some books involve more than one setting (thus the numbers in the chart below do not add up to 27).

Place: Canadian Settings n=27							
ON	BC	NS	SK	MN	P.E.I.	QB	NF
12	6	4	3	2	1	1	1

As the previous chart indicates, there are many more books in this sample set in Ontario than in any other province or territory. In fact, there are no books among the 50 that are derivative of Canadian territories at all. Also missing are direct references to Alberta. In terms of the books that cite Ontario as an internal landscape, seven out of the 12 make reference to Toronto. These findings may be indicative of the settings involved in a more general sample of Canadian children’s novels, although further research is required before conclusions can be made in this area. One other title made reference, not to a specific province, but to ‘Western Canada.’

Place: Main and Secondary Positions, Gender Specified		
n=64		
	Main Character	Secondary Character
Male	12	20
Female	15	17

In addition to ‘place’ involving the physical setting of a novel, other aspects of place include a character’s space as either a main or a secondary character, as well as the gender framework offered to that character. The previous chart displays the differentiation between characters with disabilities in main and secondary positions in their novels as well as gender specifics related to this differentiation. The range of males and females, and main and primary characters, seems equitable. A consideration of this data in relation to data from a more traditional sample of literature would be an interesting direction for further research, as well as a comparison of data from contemporary picture-book texts related to this sample of novels.

Place: Genre			
n=50			
Realistic Fiction	Historical Fiction	Fantasy/Magic Realism	Mystery
28	13	8	1

In addition to the physical setting and character's role in the novel, how the space within the novel is construed also relates to genre. As the previous chart demonstrates, over half of the titles in this study sample involve realistic fiction. Approximately a quarter of the texts in the sample represent historical fiction, with fantasy and mystery titles making up the rest. Within the fantasy category, four books involve time slips. This distribution may look similar in some ways to general distributions of texts outside this study sample, particularly with respect to the preference for realistic fiction for the age groups under consideration.

Two important points here are worth noting. The first point is that the four time slip fantasies include three texts by the same author about the same character—Darrell in K. C. Dyer's "Eagle Glen" series. This detail significantly reduces the number of authors writing fantasy texts within the study sample—two authors writing time slips among a total of six authors writing fantasy about characters with disabilities. This information may be important to consider as future trends related to books about characters with disabilities are examined. With the recent increase of interest in children's fantasy texts, will characters with disabilities appear as significant features of new titles? Implications in this regard may be drawn related to societal viewpoints regarding characters who have disabilities being viable figures in dramas that transcend time and place.

The second point with respect to genre involves further examination of stock mystery titles. Trade mysteries are available in increasing numbers, and it would be interesting to examine more closely the presence of characters with disabilities among the titles in this category. Again, if characters with disabilities

are not being produced among junior sleuths, this trend may also reflect stereotypical societal attitudes.

In terms of a definitive internal chronotope related to the place of the characters with disabilities in these 50 texts, there are two patterns that are particularly intriguing. That 27 out of the 50 titles involve settings specific to Canada is interesting in terms of any sample of Canadian books, let alone those specific to characters with disabilities. That some of the books involve multiple settings implies the potential of a character with a disability to travel within the context of the novel—an occurrence that contradicts past stereotypes about people with disabilities. Both these aspects of place may be considered significant in terms of Radical Change theory (Dresang, 1999).

While the distribution of characters with disabilities within these children's titles seems equitable in terms of gender and role in the novel, the sample does lean heavily towards realistic fiction as a preferred genre. It is possible that authors are not utilizing fantasy for this type of characterization for perhaps stereotypical reasons, just as characters with disabilities may not be appearing within mystery frameworks. These and other issues bear further consideration in future research.

Summary and Implications

My consideration of the internal chronotopes of 50 contemporary Canadian novels about characters with disabilities offers a number of patterns and trends that are contextualized within the study sample. It is important to note that such a sample is not a permanent record of books in the field, as new titles

continue to emerge as time goes on. What I have captured is a brief frame for the writing of contemporary authors, and as such, it can offer insights into the potential of these books in terms of classroom critical literacy approaches as well as directions for further research.

While diversity appears to be respected on a number of levels within the books of the study sample, a close look at these titles offers some interesting patterns as well as individual characterizations that stand out as ‘literary chronotopic types’ for other work. Among these individual characterizations, the performatively stereotypical depiction of Dopey Colvig in Lawrence’s (2006) *Gemini Summer*, the conflictingly performative portrayal of Kyle in McNicoll’s (2006) *Beauty Returns*, and the self-actualized non-issues based depiction of Rainey in Waldorf’s (2008) *Tripping* are three ‘types’ of characters with disability worth noting in terms of their depictions in time and space. Each of these portrayals has import in terms of readability and classroom discussion, offering opportunities for teachers to attend to disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints, two dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). I further explore the possibilities of a critical literacy approach with respect to these characters through my discussion of these texts in the implications of this study in Chapter Six.

In terms of the patterns and trends apparent within this study sample, few elements of Radical Change emerge, supporting Dresang’s (1999) notion that Radical Change books ‘sprout up’ with exclusive characteristics along the ‘rhizome’ of Radical Change. In addition to portrayals of disability, only a limited

display of altered forms and formats—one particular type of Radical Change—are evident. The inclusion of digital textual forms, including emails and text messages, was found in only five of the novels and only one of these offered a reading experience that included a number of elements of the plot in a non-chronological sequence. Examples of metafiction occurred infrequently, with two cases, both minimal, recorded in my notes on these texts. Alternating narration from different perspectives occurs in three different books; one book includes chapters alternating in terms of time periods, past and present; one book appears in graphic novel format; one book—Pamela Porter’s *The Crazy Man*—appears as a verse novel. It was indeed a surprise to me that a sample of books so fundamentally different in one respect—including perspectives on disability not often present in traditional texts—could contain so few radical changes in other respects.

In addition, it appears that along with the inclusion of one aspect of difference—disability—other aspects of difference have been ignored in the novels that comprise this sample: namely, differences in sexuality, ethnicity, and religion. It was a surprising discovery that among the 64 characters I examined as part of this sample, only five characterizations contained references regarding particular ethnic origins and that, with the exception of Paula in Skrypuch’s (1999) *The Hunger*, among these five books, ethnicity was not developed beyond a passing reference. It is also surprising that so few fantasy selections appeared within this sample of texts. These findings have implications in terms of a focus

on sociopolitical issues as one dimension of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) and this will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

In these children's texts, disability thus emerged as the only consistent element of Radical Change. This conclusion supports Dresang's (1999) notion of Radical Change as a "rhizome" (p. xviii), with changes in literature for youth 'sprouting up' external to any rigid hierarchical or linear framework. That these books have been developed independently from elements common in other contemporary titles makes even more critical the question about what has informed authors' choices with respect to the depiction of characters with disabilities. The inclusion of disability can thus be seen to originate with individual writers rather than as a societal trend alongside other patterns and trends in literature for children.

The next chapter offers an examination of the influences that have prompted three authors to portray characters with disabilities in their children's fiction. When considering the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002), it appears that my sample of texts will support a classroom focus on disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues. The fourth dimension of critical literacy—taking action and promoting social justice—is not supported through classroom exploration of the texts alone, implying the need for a consideration of the authors of these texts.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE AUTHOR PORTRAITS

Introduction

The author portraits included here were inspired, much as Meyer and O’Riordan (1984) were encouraged in their interviews with fourteen Canadian writers, by a lack of recent source material in which English Canadian authors discuss “what they intended their work to say, why it took shape the way it did” (p. 7). The introductions to the portraits of Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter are reminiscent of Meyer and O’Riordan’s work in that I have included an initial paragraph regarding the interview situation followed by a general biography of each author. In terms of the self-portrait, a somewhat adapted version of the above applies.

Following each introduction, the portraits move quickly into aspects of time and space related to the separate contexts of three authors writing about characters with special needs. The time-space considerations involve the application of Bakhtin’s (1981) conceptualization of the ‘chronotope’ in terms of what I refer to as an ‘external chronotope’ that appears outside the texts themselves: the time-space experiences of these authors that may have served to motivate and formulate their writing, implying collections of memories that have influenced their work and which their books, in retrospect, engender for them.

Just as readers travel to different times and places through personal connections with books, writers denote particular aspects of their pasts in plot,

setting, and characterization, a notion that McClay (2005) explores in relation to a parody written while she was in high school and which is “laden with memory of a particular time and place and the girl who inhabited them” (p. 99). I have thus employed portraiture in this study to focus on external chronotopes as a method of foregrounding personal experiences to increase the resonance of these authors’ texts in relation to time, social context, and place—categories borrowed from the field of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and applied to my chronotopic lens.

Rather than containing characteristics of other books indicative of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999), my study sample of children’s fiction about characters with disabilities contains only limited elements of Radical Change—in general, changing perspectives and, to some extent, changing boundaries—and these elements are related to the inclusion and portrayal of characters with disabilities. In addition, this study sample of children’s fiction about characters with disabilities does not include many examples of changing forms and formats, leaving it fairly limited in its identification with other radically changed texts. Rather than displaying a full range of Radical Change elements, it appears as if single authors have made specific choices with regard to the inclusion of characters with disabilities without adding disability to textual iterations that emphasize characteristics of books in the digital age. This emergence of particular texts implies that the depiction of characters with disabilities is author specific rather than trend related.

All three portraits thus attend to the multidimensional space in which these authors write (Barthes, 2008), rendering characterizations unique in children's fiction. Although disability itself is certainly a common aspect of humanity (Jaeger and Bowman, 2005), disability's reality contrasts with its lack of representation in children's fiction.

Portraiture of Rachna Gilmore

The Interview Situation

I contacted Rachna Gilmore in the fall of 2008 to begin the series of interviews that would carry me into the portraiture. When Rachna did not reply to my initial introductory email, I was disheartened, thinking her unavailable for the study; a month later, however, she responded, indicating that my email had for some reason landed in her junk email folder and that on a random check, she had recently discovered it. She expressed interest in the study and so I proceeded to send her further information as well as the consent form.

In mid November, following a busy period for us both, I forwarded seven preliminary questions that I hoped to discuss, and pursued Rachna's thoughts in their regard during a telephone conversation that occurred in early December. This conversation was tape recorded and transcribed, becoming, along with my field notes, the first field text of my study. Another telephone conversation occurred in mid January, 2009, and we had a face-to-face meeting in May, 2009, when we met during a speaking engagement Rachna had in Edmonton. Another major communication occurred in the fall of 2009, by email, concluding the year

of contact that supported my early sketches as well as the final portraiture of this children's author.

In between these four interview situations, many emails went back and forth as I sent Rachna transcripts from previous contacts and she qualified and clarified particular segments. As part of the ethics requirements of the study, I offered Rachna the opportunity to review all of the transcripts, and all of the research texts pertinent to her, prior to their inclusion in this study. It is important to note that the face-to-face meeting in May was particularly helpful in deepening my insights into Rachna's writing process, and I was able to clarify my interpretations of her work in a much more expedient manner than the phone calls and emails had provided. It is also important to note that both she, and I, enjoyed these conversations and looked forward to further contact. "You know," she said in one email, "this whole process is really interesting. I find it enriching to actually try and give voice and reason to some of the choices I've made in my writing. To try and understand it. To hear your thoughts..."

Rachna Gilmore's General Biography

Rachna Gilmore was born in India in 1953 and lived in Bombay until she was fourteen, when her family moved to London, England. After graduating with an Honours Biology degree from King's College, London, she decided to do some travelling because the United Kingdom did not appeal as home—it felt "too racist and closed." Canada beckoned for a number of reasons including its international reputation at being more diverse and accepting, and its image as projected through Pierre Trudeau. In addition, Rachna wanted to go to Prince Edward Island

because Lucy Maud Montgomery's Anne books were her favourite, growing up. The impetus of reading *Anne of Green Gables* thus took Rachna to P.E.I. where she married and completed a Bachelor of Education degree. While raising two daughters and creating pottery, Rachna often thought about writing, inspired as a child by the character of Jo in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, and enjoying reading children's books to her own family. Other than setting aside scraps of paper containing ideas, the writing dream wasn't actualized until Rachna turned thirty. Her first book, *My Mother is Weird*, was published in 1988, and since then she has published 10 other picture-books, three early readers, five children's novels, and one book of adult short fiction. Her picture-book *A Screaming Kind of Day* won a Governor General's Award for children's fiction (text) in 1999.

Rachna's books are sold internationally, with translations that include French, Danish, German, Korean, Spanish, Urdu, Bengali and Chinese. Forthcoming titles include the picture books *Catching Time* (Red Deer Press, 2010) and *The Flute* (Tradewind Books, 2011), as well as a novel for ages eight and up, *That Boy Red*, (HarperCollins Canada, 2011). In 1990, Rachna and her family moved to Ottawa, where Rachna continues to "plark"--the term she's coined to describe her writing process, a mixture of play, work, and lark.

One comment in an email conversation from Rachna stands out as it describes how her cultural background may have connected to her writing interests: "I do think that being a 'visible minority'—detestible term, but one I'll use here for want of a better one—puts you in the fringes of life at times, and so perhaps that's why I'm interested in the other people who appear to be in the

fringes of life. In *Of Customs and Excise*, for instance, I was quite aware, after writing that first story, that I wanted to explore and get inside, and understand and give voice to, the other characters who were in the fringes of that first story. Subsidiary characters, who aren't subsidiary in their own lives—because we're all central in our own lives, and we all have nuanced and layered stories to tell.

The Portrait of Rachna Gilmore

A compact feisty woman with stylishly bobbed salt and pepper hair and a rich voice that carries accents from her birthplace in India tempered by teen years spent in London and then fourteen years in Prince Edward Island before a final move to Ottawa, everything about Rachna seems quick and warm. Her bright brown eyes seem to see a great deal, taking in the world around her, and other people, with great interest. Her rapid thinking translates into tumbling, excited speech, harder to catch over the phone, but completely clear in context, the cadences youthful, the voice a parallel in tone, inflection, and emotion to what I enjoy about her writing.

I first discovered Rachna in her Governor General's Award winning picture-book *A Screaming Kind of Day* (1999), whose heroine is a little girl with a hearing impairment. I then read her junior novel *Mina's Spring of Colors* (2000), and appreciated its multicultural references; here is an author, I thought, who is cognizant of characters who have been generally marginalized in fiction. My theory was reinforced when I discovered that her first junior novel, *A Friend Like Zilla* (1995), portrayed a young woman with a developmental disability.

When examined through the lens of the external chronotope in relation to the texts she has produced, Rachna's writing process appears in relationship to time, social context, and place. I have thus used these three categories to further explore aspects of her work that lead from its inception through the drafting process, focusing on how she as an author is figuratively moved through time and space, beginning with aspects of timing and stance, examining social context and place in terms of the development of characters and settings, and then exploring aspects of time travel that seem to occur as Rachna considers her finished texts, their external chronotope carrying her back into life experiences that may be considered inspirational with regard to her writing.

Trance and Transcendence: A Matter of Timing

Rachna and I talked about various doorways through which she enters the writing of her books, and a conceptualization of plots or characters or theme seems to be a common first step in the way her stories open into being. Rachna clarified, however, that while the doorways themselves differ, at the beginning of a project there is always a sort of "quickenings, that pulse of art as it grows." I connect this initial engagement to LeGuin's (2004) suggestion that "many artists feel they're in something like a trance state while working, and that in that state they don't make the decisions. The work tells them what needs doing and they do it" (p. 225).

In specifying that her books "all started in a bunch of different ways," Rachna went on to state that: "The images, that's often one of the ways it happens. Another way the stories come is the theme; I sometimes think of the

theme first, and then the story comes and I develop the characters. It's always wonderful when the characters come first, and that's what happened with Scully in *A Screaming Kind of Day*. It is great because there's sort of truth and liveliness and life to the character that's almost a gift. Almost as though it has nothing to do with you creating it."

Rachna reported writing outlines, but only sometimes. When writing picture books, "I would jot down ideas and scraps of dialogue...and when I felt that inside me, in my head and heart, I had a sense of the shape of the story, and the voice and feelings of the main character, then I'd write it down really fast right from the heart, to capture the emotional curve...I did do outlines as novels got bigger and more complicated." Rachna also mentioned that she sometimes uses dual spiral notebooks: one for fictional notes, the other for research—outlines, if they evolve, but also for notes and scraps and thoughts and ideas. Rachna's flexible use of outlines parallels what Cross (1999) reports as her response to an infatuation of teachers who often ask her to explain to children about how she works...about the research...about making a plan and writing a first draft and then re-drafting and revising... yet "some writers never plan a book in advance," says Cross (p. 12).

The trance Rachna talked about as she becomes involved in the artistry of creating a new piece, the feeling of being "*present* in the situation—*there!*" is a state described by Sturm (2001) in relation to a reader's altered state of consciousness. "A journey of sorts seems to occur," he says, "We are transported to the story world, and for a time, if we are lucky, we are alive within that world"

(pp. 97-98). Such a consciousness shift, from Rachna's perspective as a writer, "means you can't write something too soon, you have to wait until the right time...with each piece, if I had not written it that day the flame would have been slightly different, and the story different. That's what you want to try and capture, that excitement, that entrancement! That quickening..." Consideration of the writer's trance within the writing experience limits what can be taught by teachers of writing. "I can teach the craft," said Rachna, "but not the art, which I tell students they must discover for themselves."

Transcendence from, or rising out of, this entranced state allows a writer to focus with a wider angle on aspects of the work that require research or revision, and it's possibly the stage where novice writers get caught. By remaining in the "trance" of the writing, one doesn't consider readers, or clarity, or any of the things authors may wish to think about in order to bring the work to a clear and finished state. Sarton (1980) differentiates between being self-indulgent and the conscious act of creation: "You can't wallow—you have to *control*" (p. 62). Transcendence occurs for Rachna as she works on aspects of the writing that require craft, allowing her to consider its potential as a finished product. The topic of revising came up as we discussed books and writing. "...Of course I revise," she said. "It's an essential part, and what distinguishes the amateur from the pro. You have to rewrite, and often it can be creative, but often it's plodding. And I wish I could get to the place where I could have a fabulous first draft...at first you think, 'Boy, I'm a terrible writer! You'd think by now I'd know better..." She then offered a helpful metaphor, stating, "To me, a well

written book is like a perfectly clean, harmonious and well decorated house; you don't see the work that went into it.”

When asked about supports to her writing process, Rachna offered that she walks to “work out ideas...I love the magic of trusting that seemingly disparate elements work together, that you can make the pieces fit eventually. There is reason, in the fantasy world, for everything...*Sower of Tales* is all in an imaginary world...it started with an image of an old woman bending down and planting seeds, and I thought to myself, ‘She’s planting stories!’ and a chill ran down my spine; it felt so right.” Rachna’s description of the underpinnings to her writing process relates to what Le Guin (2004) discusses when she advises writers to trust themselves, trust the story, and trust the reader.

As a mother of young children, how did writing fit into Rachna’s lifestyle? “There was an uneasy stage before a first book was accepted,” she said, “when being a writer was kind of a ‘dirty little secret.’” Some people’s faces would shut down if she talked about writing, and she could tell they were thinking, “Who do you think you are?” as well as feeling somehow diminished in comparison. “I had good parenting support among other women, many of whom were stay-at-home moms, but it was harder to say that I wasn’t available and to make time for my writing...I’d get up an hour or two ahead of the children, sometimes...but I was not disciplined. I did work steadily, but in different ways.” Writing became thus a “state of mind” where “if I worked an hour early on, the rest of the day could be spent working on something in my head.” She was writing picture books at that time, which she indicated are a “different kind of writing experience” because

they are shorter. Still, they required considerable mental energy. Sometimes she would be eating lunch with her husband, and drift off into thoughts about what she was working on, and she remembers him once teasing, “I’m all alone here, aren’t I?” Not only does Rachna travel between stances, she also travels into the time and place of her work, imagining that alternate reality as if it were truly happening.

Interestingly, there is research on particular practices which are cited as helpful to novice writers having difficulties with the revising stage but little to address a change in stance. Dix (2006) identifies that young avid writers revise continuously rather than waiting until a later “stage.” Talking at all stages of the writing process was encouraged by teachers of these avid writers, and the teachers demonstrated the construction of texts for particular purposes, showing students how to make changes for clarity. Tchudi, Estrem, and Hanlon (1997) ask students to practice generating new aspects of their topics, writing an alternate introduction or conclusion, for example, or switching the point of view. While these ideas are certainly helpful, they do not address the change in consciousness students need in order to exchange one experience of writing for another or understand the involvement of differing stances.

Social Context and Place

Embracing the idea of trust in a developing character doesn’t, according to Rachna, devalue the importance of research and she described the importance of conducting research during the creation of a text. After Rachna had written the basic first draft of *A Screaming Kind of Day* (1999), she had to work out a number

of things including specifics regarding deaf culture and the choices about how Scully would communicate, just as with Zilla she needed to find out more about developmental disabilities. “For *Atlantis Time*,” she said, talking about her current fantasy novel, “I visited Santorini, because it has many artifacts and ruins from the Minoan culture which seem to have many similarities to the culture of Atlantis, described by Plato.” Before Santorini, Rachna had not specifically travelled to research place, but she indicated that place has always informed the visual images in her fiction. She also stated that she believed I would be surprised at her technique: “When I saw the outline of your questions, I thought you were going to be disappointed when I said, ‘I just wrote these characters before I did the research.’”

This habit of “doing the research” as a way into revision speaks to Rachna’s consideration of characters rooted in time and place, created with deference to the specifics of their individuality. With respect to Zilla in *A Friend Like Zilla* (1995), Rachna reports that:

I didn’t set out with the idea of writing a book about a girl with intellectual disabilities. She just happened to be that way...the genesis of the story was one day when I was in Gatineau Park with my daughters, feeding seagulls, and I suddenly had this image in my head of two kids feeding seagulls, one of them younger and one of them a lot older...so immediately I thought that this was going to be set near the ocean. On the drive home, I thought about it some more and I initially thought the second character, the character of Zilla, was going to be an older woman,

so I thought the story was going to be about a friendship between an older woman and a younger girl (R. Gilmore, personal communication, Saturday, December 6, 2008).

As Rachna began to work out how the second character was really an older girl, not an older woman, it became possible that she might have an intellectual disability. “This may seem to people who are concerned about getting the facts absolutely right...as unorthodox, but I tend to do my research after I’ve written my first draft...I had noticed that a lot of stories that are written about children with disabilities tend to focus on the disability and there’s not often much of a story there, so I wanted it to be a good story...So I wrote the story first, and then I did the research.”

Time Travel

When I asked Rachna about her writing process in general and her construction of particular books, her reflections often took her back in time to the inception of her love for reading and to particular books that were influential. As a child, Rachna adored Lucy Maud Montgomery. “I was interested in books...that had to do with belonging.”

When Rachna was living in England, not feeling at home, she knew she didn’t want to return to India, remembering that as a child she found the world there “large and frightening” and wondering where else she could feel at home. The Anne books, in part, inspired her to think about Prince Edward Island, and that was her choice of travel destination when she had finished her university degree in biology. “I think about it now and there was a safe thread in those

books,” she said, indicating that they were a constant between the first part of her life in India, and the move to London. “When I started reading those books as a girl in India, I didn’t at first realize that PEI was a real place. And then one day when I discovered it was, probably when I was studying geography at school, I thought, ‘I’ll go there!’”

Acceptance has become a major theme in much of Rachna’s work for children; in *A Friend Like Zilla* (1999), for example, Uncle Chad is disdainful of Zilla because of her intellectual disability. In return, Nobby despises her uncle for his restricted thinking. Both Nobby and Uncle Chad learn to see the world, and each other, in a different way, due to their relationship with Zilla. As Rachna and I consider the importance of the theme of acceptance in her work, we are transported back in time to a place where a young girl wonders where in the world might she find a safe place, and a welcoming community that would be home.

As to Rachna’s early motivation to write, she reported winning an essay competition at school in Bombay with a cheeky piece about Mondays. The prize was a book. The school commonly offered books as prizes for various achievements, including high marks. One of these became Rachna’s original copy of *Little Women*, another book that had great influence on her thinking and development. “I identified with Jo. I reread it for the umpteenth time—and suddenly I thought to myself, ‘When I grow up I will write stories.’”

As we contemplate the body of work that Rachna has produced, another trip through time ensues, taking us back to a woman walking on the beach with her husband, talking about her desire to write, and the fact that she has not yet

embarked on any kind of writing project. Their conversation prompted Rachna to examine whether she was stalling a writing career because she was afraid of failure. At that point, the fear of never trying conquered her fear, and she began to take courses, read with an eye for the writing, and learn all she could about writing. Rachna described a Lucy Maud Montgomery character who was indecisive in this same way, and who overcomes it by thinking about what she would wish she'd done when she was eighty. "I started to believe in myself," said Rachna, "And really work at it."

When I asked more specifically about the way Rachna conceptualizes characters with disabilities, as she is one of the few Canadian authors depicting characters with special needs, she spoke of the genesis of Scully, the character who is hearing impaired in *A Screaming Kind of Day* (1999). "I was having a conversation with someone about children with disabilities, and what I got thinking on the drive home was about how we tend to think of children with disabilities in terms of what they can't do, rather than what they can do...And the character of Scully came to me on the drive...and I could hear her voice and what she was saying. And I knew that she was this enormously lively, strong, energetic girl with not a trace of self pity, and her mother was a very strong woman who had great respect for her and was not going to let her daughter get away with anything. Scully was...mischievous...a handful...she's absolutely going to use whatever she can, including her so-called disability, to her advantage! I was quite captured by her, and so when I got home I started to jot down notes." Again, Rachna was referring to a process that develops the kernel of writing through

entrancement, and then, later, transcends that kernel towards establishing a finished product, creating a world, and a child, that are believable and understood by readers.

As she considered further the character of Scully, she is reminded of the time period when she was conducting research about hearing impairments. “And one day as I was walking down my street I noticed that there was a sign saying Deaf Children Area. I’d walked down that street lots of times before and never noticed this sign. I thought, ‘Oh, someone on this street has a child who is hard of hearing...I wonder who it is.’ And as I continued to do my research and got in touch with an organization of parents with children who were hard of hearing, I realized that two or three occupants ago, the people who lived in my house—I recognized their name on my list—had a child who was hard of hearing. This child had lived in the house that I lived in!”

Rachna and I talked further about coincidence, and collective consciousness, and Rachna described how she prefers to write in the first person as much as possible—“and part of that is so I can get inside that character’s skin and head and be that person and feel that character’s heart. Feel her pain and her emotions and her needs.” The traveling she spoke of implied an actual transition into the life of the character at hand.

I wondered if Rachna’s particular empathy stems from having, at times, felt marginalized herself because of being a visible minority, and hence at times being perceived as someone whose culture must therefore be different. “I think so,” she said, and then generalized that “Every child feels this—we all have some

way in which we feel the ‘other.’ And I’ve learned that. Because when you come into a society where there is racism...or you have a disability... there’s a tendency to think that your particular suffering is the worst kind...And when you grow older you realize you’re not the only one—every single person experiences this in some way or another.” Perhaps in her writing, Rachna is working to offer her readers the sort of “safe thread” she herself found in books, a connection that supported her development of self-identity, that encouraged her writing passion, that carried her from one continent to another and, as she thinks about her writing, that carries her back the other way, in time and place, to her own storied past.

I think of the inscription in Bateson’s (1994) *Peripheral Visions*: “Until you are at home somewhere, you cannot be at home everywhere.” These threads that Rachna talked about, perhaps they are what let some readers feel at home in the context of her work, connect to a character who may represent the person they are or the person they would be, allowing them to feel at home within the spaces the book provides. Or perhaps Rachna’s work offers readers the kind of “world” - travelling Maria Lugones talks about when she describes how outsiders practice a “loving way of being and living” (1987, p. 3) by entering into a foreign world.

As readers, I think we do both, interpreting ourselves and others through fiction, embracing dual perspectives. As a writer, Rachna embraces dual perspectives, as well: the artistic view from inside the trance, when she sees and empathizes with the characters she is creating, and the transcendent view from outside the work, as she crafts and finishes a product that she wants others to be able to decode and understand.

Summary

Through an external chronotopic lens, it appears that Rachna's writing moves her backwards and forwards through time and space as she considers her own storied past. Her texts also invite a shift inwards and outwards with respect to bearing witness: "*Mina's Spring of Colors, A Group of One*, and the "Gita" books, partly bear witness to a particular time here in Canada" as well as to the internal renderings of the characters she depicts. That Rachna prefers using a first person point of view, and plots carefully the landscape on which her books resonate, further clarifies elements of the external chronotope that is at work.

The result of the external chronotope that is described here involves a kind of momentum that, when realized, changes the experience of Rachna's texts, enriching them, deepening their resonance. Her portrayal of characters with disabilities thus appears as another layer of the life that she is living, offering readers rich depictions that are more than happy accidents or opportunities developed through the trends of Radical Change. As educators consider Rachna's storied past alongside her children's books, we are offered motivation for including these books in classrooms where "some children never learn to feel at home, to feel they really belong..." (Paley, 1992, p. 103). Aspects of Rachna's work operate as taking action and promoting social justice through the manner in which she disrupts the commonplace, interrogates multiple viewpoints, and focuses on sociopolitical issues, four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

Portraiture of Pamela Porter

The Interview Situation

My first attempts to contact Pamela Porter occurred in the fall of 2008, utilizing an email address that I obtained from the internet. When Pamela did not respond to two emails sent within a month of each other, I wrote a letter to her publisher, requesting that it be forwarded to her. When after a month I still had no reply, I checked with my thesis supervisor, who located an alternate email address from a friend—I had apparently been working with an email address that was incorrect. Pamela's reply to this last email occurred on the day it was sent, including a positive message about my research and a willingness to participate: proof that perseverance is rewarded!

The interviews with Pamela occurred between fall of 2008 and fall of 2009, operating by email as that mode of communication was her preference. Following the receipt of information about the study and the signing of the consent form, I sent Pamela eight topic outlines to which she responded at length in writing. After perusing her responses, I selected particular images and events I wanted to pursue, and requested that Pamela respond in more detail in their regard. In addition, I offered particular stories of my own in relation to past experiences as a model for the kind of historical inquiry I was pursuing through narrative. Following an email glitch, I resent my response and further query three weeks later. Pamela responded to this email on the same day, reaffirming my faith in the process and her interest in the study, and requested time to think about the events that might have triggered her thinking in terms of the characterizations in

The Crazy Man (2005), an intermediate realistic fiction novel that involves Emaline, a young girl involved in a farm accident that has left her with a physical disability, and Angus, a middle-aged man who has recently left the town's mental institution to work as a farm hand for Emaline's mother.

As our email conversations continued, we discovered mutual connections. Both of us are busy with growing families and we conferred about school lunches and the general pace of our hectic schedules, offering a context for the emails that occurred sporadically over the course of the next months. One noteworthy addition to Pamela's schedule was an invitation to speak at "Serendipity," an annual conference put on at the University of British Columbia by the Children's Literature Roundtable of Vancouver. She had been preparing to address the conference theme "Telling Our Stories" and settled on summarizing the history of the Weyburn Mental Hospital, the site that became integral in her inspiration for, and creation of, *The Crazy Man* (2005).

Pamela Porter's General Biography

Pamela Porter was born in New Mexico in 1956 and lived in various American States before moving to Canada with her husband. She and her family now live on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, although when she began to write *The Crazy Man* (2005), she and her husband had been spending part of every summer in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, working on the family farm. They have two older children—a daughter and a son—and photos of Pamela show her alongside a chestnut gelding, a light breeze ruffling her thick, short hair, and smiling into the sunshine.

“I do have a love for stray animals!” she reported. “I suppose I feel some kind of kinship with any human or animal who has had a rough go of life. It gives one a different perspective....like the person who has had a serious illness and cherishes each moment in a way she/he didn’t before the illness. What fascinates me is that when life throws you around and wounds you deeply, when you manage to stand up again, you may see everything in a new light. There is no guarantee that you will see life in a new way; some people become bitter and defeated. But some become better people, more profoundly human as a result of suffering.” I interpreted Pamela’s comments here as a description of the kind of resilience portrayed in the characterizations of Emaline and Angus in *The Crazy Man*—two characters who have indeed had a ‘rough go of life,’ and yet emerge as richer for the experience.

Pamela began her writing career as a poet, an experience that nudged her towards seeking the power of short line lengths and white space in what would become her Governor General’s Award winning verse novel *The Crazy Man* (2005), a title that displayed a characteristic of Radical Change lacking in many of the titles in the study sample—‘changing forms and formats’—in addition to other characteristics of Radical Change—‘changing perspectives and changing boundaries’. Pamela has two published books of poetry for adults—*Stones Call Out* (2006) and *The Intelligence of Animals* (2008) in addition to two intermediate novels—*Sky* (2004), and *The Crazy Man* (2005), and a picture-book: *Yellow Moon, Apple Moon* (2008). Her undergraduate degree is from the Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, where she met her husband; Pamela also

has a Masters of Fine Arts, specializing in creative writing, from the University of Montana.

The Portrait of Pamela Porter

The picture I carry in my head of Pamela Porter is the same one that appears in many of her publicity shots—a woman of average height, standing beside a chestnut gelding, her thick, short hair ruffled by a breeze, smiling into the sunlight. She seems like a person most comfortable outdoors, someone who listens to the sounds and silences of nature, yet who also values the stories of people—human voices working their way into fiction that sensitively deals with recovery from loss.

When I utilize an external chronotopic lens in relation to the texts Pamela has produced, her writing process emerges through specific relationships with time, social context, and place, categories that appear irrevocably blended in the paragraphs that follow. As with Rachna Gilmore's portrait, I have used these categories to further explore aspects of the inception of Pamela's work, focusing on how she as an author responds to the 'triggering towns' (Hugo, 1979) of her storied past as well as how she envisions her stance as a writer. As Pamela and I considered her work on *The Crazy Man* (2005), our discussion quickly turned to the temporal, foregrounding places and social contexts that have been greatly influential. We thus time travelled towards real people and places that have influenced the characters and plots that Pamela presents, cognizant of the cultural, historical, and social influences that have offered voice to the discursive struggles that occur in the sites of Pamela's writing.

Self-Transformation

In terms of a chronotope external to the texts she is writing and related to authorial stance, Pamela talked about subjects that dominate her thoughts until she writes about them, forcing her to sit down and bring out the ideas bit by bit on paper—difficult when it’s a large subject that takes months or years to unpack. “First comes a subject that haunts me and won’t let go; next comes the ‘tie your butt to the chair’ stage so that I require myself to see it through to the end.”

In terms of characterization, Pamela reported that she sees “a number of lives simultaneously. I joke with other fiction writers that one’s characters live with you, stand over your bed and wake you up, sit at the table and watch you eat, and demand to be attended to. (As) E. L. Doctorow said, ‘Writing is an acceptable form of schizophrenia.’” Pamela confided that after the characters start following her around and she commits to telling their story, she thinks about what she needs to learn in order to accomplish that. “Sometimes I spend months just reading, though often I read with pen and paper close by in case I need to write down information...that comes to me while doing the research. I also write down certain facts, place names, etc. that will be important. After I’ve done quite a bit of reading, I start to write. Sometimes I get to a point in the writing where I realize I need to take a break and go back and read some more. I might reread a book I’d already read, or I might go find another book on another aspect of the subject that will give me different information and insights.”

The process Pamela described is full of motion, backwards and forwards, inwards and outwards, considering place, as she weaves her way between real and

imagined lives. “To my mind, it's all connected and part of the whole writing process,” she stated. “I don't make an outline though I do make lists, and I keep a lot in my head. When I finished writing *The Crazy Man*, I was really amazed at how much I kept in my head at one time. I think in normal daily life I can't keep so much in my head, but writing a novel seems to occupy a different space in my brain.” Pamela's description of her ‘writing brain’ is reminiscent of the entrancement Rachna Gilmore talked about as she discussed her own engagement in a writing project.

Pamela is conscious of giving her writing the physical time and space required to complete the telling of stories, while at the same time acknowledging that a separate yet connected mental process is at work, influencing why and how these stories are told. Her description of this mental process links to Luce-Kapler's (2004) acknowledgement that writing practices “...help to interpret experience and reveal what is already known. Writing practices also can teach us how texts work and are a good starting place for critical awareness of language and textual structures” (p. 158).

Social Context and Mental Illness

Pamela presented a session on the history of the Weyburn Mental Hospital for the University of British Columbia's Serendipity conference in January of 2009, combining archival photographs of life at the hospital with excerpts from her verse novel *The Crazy Man* (2005) in which a character from a similar mental hospital transitions, in 1965, to life outside the institution. Following her talk, she reported that “many people came up to me with their own psychiatric hospital

stories; I think it is a statement to the continuing stigma of mental illness or around an institution that treated, or mis-treated, the mentally ill...it takes someone to give permission and a space to be able to talk about those things. I heard many more stories that day. I thought it was a risk to talk about the mental hospital at a conference for children's literature, but it seemed to open up doors to many old memories."

I mentioned Pamela's experiences regarding the conference to a relative who had grown up a few hours away from Weyburn. This relative's response included the reflection that when he was a youth in the late sixties, the Weyburn Mental Institution often provided a source for ridicule. Kids would jibe each other: "What's wrong with you—are you from Weyburn?" Pamela shared that a poet friend also reported hearing similar epithets when she was young, things like "You're going to end up in Weyburn!" indicating that a person's actions were somehow odd enough to warrant admission to the hospital. These comments correspond with another statement of Pamela's: "My husband Rob has said that when he used to go on band trips across Saskatchewan, others would ask, 'Where are you from?' And when he said 'Weyburn,' eyebrows would lift. Sometimes others would say, 'Oh, Weyburn, eh?' as if to imply that the band group had come directly from the mental hospital."

Weyburn itself thus appears as a strong, shaping force within the external chronotope involving Pamela's rendering of *The Crazy Man* (2005), a novel that takes place in Souris, a fictional town in Saskatchewan, named after the river that

obsessive-compulsive disorder, or any number of mental illnesses for which there are treatments today.”

In terms of stories about the Weyburn hospital, Pamela acknowledged how some people who worked there were proud of the roles they held, supporting patients through psychiatric nursing or working in the laundry or kitchen. Other people in town were frightened of the patients although many of these patients did not have mental illnesses. “In those days, you didn’t have to have a doctor’s certificate to commit someone to ‘the mental;’ you could be admitted simply on the word of a family member, or sometimes, a neighbour.”

Pamela responded to stories about the hospital by wondering how, if someone was ever admitted to the institution, they would ever be released. She was haunted by particular narratives, including one from a family friend who, as a child, lived on a farm near the Weyburn mental hospital. His father hired many of the patients but told Rodney to stay away from them. “‘They were dangerous and not quite human,’ was the message young Rodney received from his father. One day Rodney said he was descending a staircase, when one of the hired hands was ascending the stairs. Rodney said he was frightened, especially when he got closer to the man. Then the hired man from ‘the mental’ bent over and tied up Rodney’s shoelace. Rodney said he knew then, at the age of five, that the man was human, and that his father was wrong.” Pamela worked this story directly into her characterizations of Emaline and Angus in her novel *The Crazy Man* (2005). The excerpt that follows, repeated from the introductory chapter of this dissertation, is all the richer for the backstory Pamela tells regarding its inception.

*I couldn't decide if I should go to the trouble
to hobble all the way around
to the front porch to avoid him,
or if I should try to just slide past him
there on the back step.*

*Mum called again, looking down
out of the window over the sink.
So I started toward the back step. I got closer
to the crazy man.*

*My hands gripped hard
on the handles of my crutches.
My good foot landed in front of the step
where he sat eating off our blue plate
with the chip on one side.*

*All of a sudden he put his plate down
on the ground, and he bent over
and tied up my shoelace. (pp. 49 – 50)*

Pamela reported wanting to write about the stigma of mental illness in this historical time period because today, in the 21st century, this stigma largely remains. She hoped to write about a character “who was labelled mentally ill just because he had been admitted to the hospital at one time...wanted to talk about the notion of what is crazy...who really is ‘the crazy man’ in the story...” Readers can identify the response of the surrounding community to both Emaline and Angus as the crazy element, to be sure, and Pamela stated, “I am still often disturbed at how easily we marginalize people.” She reported working hard to avoid portraying anyone as two-dimensional, however: “I do think that people can

change their minds pretty quickly if brought face to face with the evidence of another person's full humanity.”

Counterstories and Triggering Towns

During our conversations, I posed that the story Pamela is telling in *The Crazy Man* (2005) is really a counterstory to historical and even contemporary stigma associated with mental illness, involving a definition of counterstory broached by Lindemann Nelson (1995) who discusses how narratives of resistance challenge paradigm stories embedded within a community, “contributing to the moral self-definition of the teller” (p. 23). I asked Pamela whether, in her formative years, she had adult role models who demonstrated the enactment of counterstories that opposed dominant culture. She responded, “I’ve been thinking all this time, since you wrote, about where I got the idea to act out my counterstory and whether I had adult models. The answer is that the adults around me were frustratingly compliant with the status quo.”

Pamela did eventually offer two examples of anti-establishment modelling from her childhood, one involving the grandmother of a friend whom Pamela admired. “In the South, some food was on the plate as ‘decoration,’ like parsley, and the lettuce leaf that sat under a spoonful of fruit salad or avocado. Sophisticated ladies showed their sophistication by never eating the ‘decorative’ food on their plates. I thought Ann’s grandmother was so rebellious because she always ate the lettuce leaf ‘because she liked it.’”

The second example occurred when Pamela was about 10 years old and addicted to the national news on television. “I would make sure I came inside

from playing by 5 o'clock so I could watch Walter Cronkite or Huntley & Brinkley. I was fascinated at what was going on in the world, and even in my part of the United States, Louisiana and Texas, that I would never have known about had I not surreptitiously sat in on the news. I watched marches, and young Black girls nearly my age saying, 'We've waited 100 years for justice to come; we've waited 100 years to vote. Don't ask us to wait any longer.' I saw President Lyndon Johnson on television pushing for desegregation of schools and the voting rights act, and saying, 'We shall overcome.' It was a gutsy thing for him to say at the time. I remember watching Governor George Wallace of Alabama stand at the front steps of the University of Alabama and refuse to let young Black students enter. I hear parents talk about the 'junk food' of television, but it was my social education."

Another perspective on the telling of counterstories came to Pamela from books. A book that has always inspired her from childhood through adulthood continues to be *To Kill a Mockingbird*. "I became more conscious of my own counter story by reading that book," Pamela confided, "and I still think about scenes from that book today. In fact, just yesterday, I think it was, I was thinking about the picket gate knocking about in the autumn wind at the end of that book, and how could I recreate not only that scene but the feeling I have when I think about the picture that remains in my mind."

Pamela discussed further how other books have influenced her own writing. "In terms of the books that inspired me when I was young, I think Irene Hunt's *Up A Road Slowly* was the first book I read that absorbed my attention to

such an extent that I didn't hear a thing the teacher was saying and would read on long after she had told us to put our reading away and get ready for a different exercise. I was in grade 6. I thought it was magic to be able to string words together that had the effect of drawing a complete stranger into a world entirely of the author's making. I think that was the first time I ever considered writing to be something I might aspire to, though it seemed such a lofty goal, one that I might never be able to reach.”

“As for what has inspired my writing as an adult,” Pamela stated, “when I came across Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust* as I was shelving books in my children's primary school library, I was stunned to see the novel written as free verse. For some time I had thought I would like to write a novel in narrative poems, but I didn't know if anyone had done such a thing, and I might be the first. Given my years of failure at publishing, it seemed to be asking for more rejection to go ahead and write a novel in narrative poems. But when I saw Karen Hesse's book, I exclaimed in silence, "Somebody HAS done it!" and after reading her book, decided I would go ahead with my project.” The novel that Pamela completed was her Governor General's Award winning *The Crazy Man*.

How do these early examples of books, stories and counterstories connect to *The Crazy Man* (2005) beyond the influence of form and format? “The presence of the mental hospital and the various reactions of members of the (Weyburn) community were all new examples of story and counterstory,” reported Pamela. “My professor at the University of Montana in my MFA program, Richard Hugo...wrote a book on the craft of writing titled, *The*

Triggering Town. In the book, Hugo says that the ‘triggering town’ for a writer is the town you wander into, the town you’ve never been to before, but in which you soon realize you’ve lived there all your life, you know the people in it and you know the griefs that the town bears, because it is your psychic town. I think Weyburn, because of the hospital and the people we visited who had known my husband all his life, became my ‘triggering town.’ I realized that Weyburn was in many respects a Southern town with its strict unwritten culture and its guilt and shame over the presence of the mental hospital, much like Southern towns I knew where the citizens had to deal daily with the guilt and shame of racial segregation.

Time Travel

In addition to the juxtaposition of a real place, Weyburn, over the fictional landscape described in *The Crazy Man* (2005), it appeared that other counterstories from Pamela’s past gave line and form to the time and place rendered in this novel, offering an external chronotope that carries us back to Pamela’s childhood experiences opposing dominant white culture.

Pamela talked about one of these experiences, an incident whose telling allowed us to time travel to 1968 when Pamela was attending Robert E. Lee Junior High in Monroe, Louisiana. “My mother had told me before I started school...that I should address my elders as ‘Yes Ma’am’ and ‘No Sir,’ so I tried to remember to do so,” Pamela related. “The janitorial staff were all African-Americans, and one day I had said good morning to one of the janitors, an elderly man with a kind face. He must have said something about it being a nice day, because I replied, ‘Yes, Sir, it is.’ Then, the girl who was walking with me into

the school turned to me and said, ‘What you doin’ callin’ him Sir?’ See, in that culture, African-Americans were regularly called by their first names. Even at the age of 12, I found it unjust. I decided that if I was required to call my white elders ‘Sir’ or ‘Ma’am,’ then I would call every one of my elders ‘Sir’ or ‘Ma’am.’ And I did. I had the loveliest conversations with women standing at bus stops after their day working as housekeepers at my neighbour’s houses. Those women always greeted me and told me what a nice child I was.”

Summary

Consideration of the external chronotope regarding Pamela’s creation of *The Crazy Man* (2005) allowed me to consider the counterstories Pamela tells that contrast with dominant culture, and, as well, allowed me to consider the social activism involved in such a telling. As a young person, Pamela was prepared to demonstrate opposition to traditions she saw as unfair regarding African-Americans in her southern community. Glimpses of critical sides to the issues of desegregation came to her from media, offering the context she required to take a stand. That such a context is similar to the one described in contemporary critical literacy teaching approaches is an interesting connection between the books Pamela writes, the person she is, and the students who will be reading her work.

With the inclusion of Pamela’s personal perspectives on social justice in her writing, she can be identified as taking action in terms of disrupting commonplaces, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues—dimensions of critical literacy described by Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002). Perhaps *The Crazy Man* will elicit the exploration of tensions with respect

to societal stigma about disability, much as the 5 o'clock news was a catalyst in Pamela's development; perhaps *The Crazy Man* will even become a 'triggering town,' opening a space for readers to recognize similar tensions among conflicting social forces in their own world.

Through the external chronotopic lens, Pamela's entranced writing—motivated by her early entrancement with reading—moves her backwards and forwards through time and space as she considers her own storied past, at the same time inviting inwards and outwards motion with respect to the people she knows and the characters she depicts. That she prefers poetry formats, and allows landscape to affect her storytelling, further clarifies elements of the external chronotope that appear to be at work in her writing. That she appreciates the resilience of people who adapt to life changes is another characteristic that definitely shows in her fictional portrayals.

The external chronotope that is described here involves a momentum similar, in some ways, to the momentum offered by Rachna Gilmore's texts; an understanding of the dimensions surrounding textual creation enriches that creation, deepening its meaning. Pamela's portrayal of characters with disabilities thus appears as a layer added to her own past experiences, offering readers the resonance of particular elements that have informed her writing process. The foregrounding of Pamela's storied past alongside her writing increases motivation for including *The Crazy Man* (2005) in classrooms where educators wish to develop "social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of

societal responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole” (Bell, 1997, p. 3).

Self-Portraiture

My intellectual journey through time and space, searching for experiences that may have served to motivate and formulate my writing about characters with disabilities, offers a collection of memories that have not only influenced the development of my work, but which are conjured up as I contemplate particular finished texts. In this way I am drawn backwards and forwards, inward and outward, and into a consideration of place, my present day self fastening words from moments of stopped time into this dissertation through an exploration of the external chronotope surrounding the inception of *Wild Orchid* (2005) and a more recent exploration of characters with disabilities in *The Moon Children* (2007).

The Writing of Personal Narrative

An exploration of my own understandings regarding disability occurred through my writing of personal narrative as I composed vignettes for a graduate course I was taking on narrative inquiry, taught by Dr. Jean Clandinin.

Conceptualizations of identity related to my teaching and writing emerged through stories that became increasingly rich with layered meanings as I shifted backwards and forwards, inwards and outwards, with specific attention to place, attending to the three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of narrative inquiry. Many of the narratives I composed highlighted aspects of my relationship with my mother through stories she had told during my growing up years and adulthood. I recall tremendous surprise as I surveyed the swelling pile

of manuscript; I had not returned to university to inquire into my mother's history or my own.

As these vignettes became increasingly pertinent to my topic of study, I began to consider their importance in relationship to the developing self-portrait drawn through the influence of Keith (2001) who included her books, somewhat reluctantly, in a discussion of fictional depictions of characters with disabilities. "It may seem a strange decision to include my own work..." (p. 227) she says, and yet without a commentary on my own fiction about characters with disabilities, the underpinnings of this dissertation would have been neglected. The self-portrait that was drawn through personal narrative has thus considered narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as well as autoethnography (C. Ellis, 2004; C. Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and is, I believe, an evocative part of this dissertation. Stories lived and told are powerful in the manner in which they shape insight and action, and just as my mother's stories shaped my developing conceptualizations, stories in classrooms have wide potential for informing the actions of teachers and students. As Coles (1989) stated, "Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (p. 30).

My General Autobiography

I was born in 1962 to a Saskatoon family with two older children. Because of the age difference of 12 years between me and my siblings, and the lack of young people in my neighbourhood, I spent considerable hours alone, wedged between the lilac hedge and the chipped white fence separating our yard from the

lane, conversing aloud with imaginary friends. These dialogues gave me a sense of voice and entrancement that perhaps assisted with creating characters for fiction as I endeavour to imagine the circumstances of invented characters and walk in their shoes.

I enjoyed reading as a child, and found that in difficult life circumstances, I turned to books for solace and escape. During a traumatic grade eight year when I was badly bullied by a group of other girls, I obsessively read and reread Zindel's *The Pigman* and L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*—completing each of these entrancing texts at least a dozen times. While I related to books as a reader, and wrote poetry myself, I didn't really think about writing fiction until I was an adult and reading copious amounts of children's books to my own young boys. My fiction for children and adults began when I was in my late twenties, although I didn't have a book published until I was thirty-five years old, and my vein of fiction about characters with disabilities didn't transpire until I was in my mid forties. These publications, it's important to note, came after copious rejections from publishers.

I began teaching in the spring of 1984, beginning with grades two and three and then teaching in middle years' classrooms before becoming a specialist in gifted education. After completing a masters' degree in curriculum studies and working as a special education teacher for a number of years in elementary schools, I held a position with Saskatoon Public Schools as a consultant for exceptional learning needs, and, following this, returned to university to work on

my doctorate. Further personal information is available from my biography in CM Magazine: <http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm/profiles/brenna.html>.

My children's fiction has consistently included depictions of life on the margins. In my first intermediate novel, *Spider Summer* (1998), ethnic diversity and transitions through travel are two primary themes. *The Keeper of the Trees* (1999) characterizes a homeless woman within a fantasy framework connected to life in central London; in addition, a young boy with a chronic illness inspires a consideration of environmental issues. *Wild Orchid* (2005) and its sequel *More About the Experience of Life* (pending) chronicle through realistic fiction the experiences of a young woman with Asperger's Syndrome. *The Moon Children* (2007) follows a developing friendship between a boy with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and a girl who demonstrates selective mutism as a result of Post Traumatic Stress. My collection of young adult short stories—*Something To Hang On To* (2009)—offers considerable diversity with protagonists that depict ethnic minorities as well as characters with disabilities. A new young adult novel intended for publication in 2011—*Falling for Henry*—focuses on a young woman limited by anxiety issues until time travel offers her the opportunity to manage her fears.

The Self-Portrait

What from my early landscapes has caused me as a writer to negotiate disability issues within the context of book characters? How have my early experiences been reflected in my practices as a teacher? In what ways have the stories I have heard and lived through affected my understandings of 'curriculum

commonplaces’ —learner, milieu, teacher, and subject matter (Schwab, 1978)? I sift back through early experiences, searching for elements that outline and colour my conceptualization of identity and disability. Many of my memories centre on the stories told by my mother, a prairie girl born in 1916 on a mixed farm near Indian Head, Saskatchewan. These stories twist and turn around my current thoughts on writing and teaching. In this self-portrait, I have presented narratives from my life as a daughter, teacher, reader, and writer, inviting introspection into the events which have informed my work, and, in particular, influenced the social constructions of disability which relate to my classroom landscape as well as my published stories on behalf of lived texts.

Stories my mother told me as a child are recursive in my consciousness as a developing teacher. These are stories about the 1920’s farming community in which she grew up, her experiences as a child in one-room schoolhouses, and, later, stories about her own teaching, about the dilemmas she faced with students and their parents and the new communities she adopted as her own. Within the landscape of my mother’s stories about school, I continue to search for foundations to support my own developing landscapes.

In response to my illustrations of what life is like for me in schools, my ninety-two-year-old mother shook her head. She told me that she had never encountered children like those I described in “modern” classrooms—kids whose behaviour is at times completely unmanageable by traditional school standards. Her classroom landscape of the mid 1930s and early 1940s supported “pale, malnourished depression kids whose lips trembled if the teacher even glanced

their way” (M. Stilborn, personal communication, September, 2008). These children did not ask for control, but for reassurance. A teacher who took the time to think things through would find her way. “Not like how things are today,” she said, biting her lip at the challenges I described with classroom management. Her stories, however, are powerful. They know more than perhaps even she knows.

Johnny and the Pear

I am sitting at the kitchen table waiting for lunch. I am five years old and I have just come home from Kindergarten. My mother is mixing milk with the contents of a can of Campbell’s mushroom soup and stirring it in a pot on the stove. She is telling me about how things were, when she was a child. “Tell another old one,” I say, meaning one of the old times’ stories. “Tell *Johnny and the Pear*.”

It is 1924 and my mother is a grade five student attending a one-room school in southern Saskatchewan. “Seven-year-old Johnny and his immigrant parents had just moved into the district, and the students were not being very receptive to him. On this particular day in September, a season when cases of peaches, pears, and plums were brought home from town to be preserved in glass jars for winter use, the girls are sitting under the shade of a caragana hedge, eating noon lunch. Mary opens her pail and gives a squeal of disappointment. On top of her sandwiches there is a piece of tissue paper, but the pear her mother had promised is missing. Immediately the students think of Johnny.” (Brenna, 2008b, p. 255)

As my mother relates the rest of the story, her voice is thick with regret. The students chase Johnny down the road. He runs until he cannot run anymore, and then he falls in the dirt. The students pounce. They assure him that if he owns up to taking the pear, they'll let him go. Dutifully, he confesses. Someone runs and tells the teacher. Johnny is herded back into the school, where he receives the strap. That afternoon the room is uncomfortably quiet, except for Johnny's sobs. The next morning, Mary has a secret. "My mother found the pear, forgotten, on the shelf at home," she says (M. Stilborn, personal communication, 2008).

I watch my mother carefully as she finishes the story and spoons soup into my bowl. Her nose is red, and her eyes are all watery. I smile. My mother is very predictable. Along with the soup, there is a Prem sandwich and rice pudding for dessert. I am hungry, and I eat.

Old Jones

"Tell me another of the old ones," I demand. It's after lunch and my mother's nap time. I am almost six, and too big for naps. I attend grade one, but today is a holiday. I want to be loud and play, but my mother is 51 years old and she needs to rest. "It is 1921," she tells me sleepily, taking me back with words to the farm near Indian Head where she and two siblings grew up. It is a work day, not Sunday, and she, not yet school-age, is playing on tin-can stilts in the yard, when Old Jones, a deaf-mute, strides up the road, dust on his clothes and on the hands he uses to gesture greetings and dispense dark chocolate. He'll stay a week and maybe two, helping Grandad with the chores, until the wind pushes him down the road towards the next farm.

“Didn’t he have a home?” I ask, as I always do. “Everyone’s home was his home,” says my mother. “There was no welfare relief, back then, for people who hadn’t the means to live on their own.” I imagine what it would be like if Old Jones came to our door. He’d have to sleep on the couch in the living room, near the heat register, because we don’t have a cot in the kitchen near a wood burning stove.

From an early age, my mother’s storytelling has added texture to my life, shading perspectives about diversity and respect for all people. Her story underpins my story, and, in the beginning, before my story had amounted to much, her story was my story. My mother drifts off to sleep and I play with plastic red bricks on the floor beside the bed. I begin to build a house, but it’s boring. I creep onto the bed and jump. “Oof,” says my mother, my weight on her chest pushing the air out of her lungs. Later she would tell me that some days she was sure she was never going to be able to get up, that she would be found there by my father, smothered and solidly dead. But she is always laughing when she says it.

Wild Horses

As I prepare to become a teacher by studying at the university, my mother’s stories gain poignancy. It is 1935 and she is eighteen years old and attending Normal School in Regina. The hundred dollar fee was an obstacle until her grandmother sent a cheque. Without the extra dollar for paints, my mother sits, flushed and empty-handed, in art class; finally, the instructor pulls her desk alongside a neighbour. “You’ll have to share,” the instructor snaps. At age 19, my

mother graduates from Normal School, and, in January, 1936, she heads to her first school, a hamlet near Estevan.

The train passes brittle fields, gaunt livestock bracing themselves hunch-shouldered against the wind. As the train slows around a bend, she catches sight of a group of hollow-eyed horses pawing the ground for what could only be the most meagre sustenance. But when the train whistles, the animals—transformed—lift their heads and run, manes and tails flowing, sun gleaming on their shining sides.(Brenna, 2008b, pp. 254 – 255)

The image of these animals became the inspiration for my mother's poem "Wild Horses," widely published in Copp-Clark's Grade VI Reader, *All Sails Set*. Her poem, and the context in which it was written, reminds me of the transformative power of fiction, for in the words that follow, the skeletal horses have vanished, replaced forever with the vibrant creatures my mother wished them to remain.

Wild Horses

*We saw them drink from a quiet stream
As clear as their own dark eyes,
Their necks were arched in the sunlight's gleam,
And they were beautiful as a dream
When they drank at dawn from a quiet stream
As clear as their own dark eyes.*

*We saw them run on the open plains
Untouched by the whip and spur,
The wind was soft in their tossing manes,
The love of freedom was in their veins
As they ran for joy on the open plains,
Untouched by the whip and spur.*

*We saw them stand on a hilltop high
With nostrils wide to the breeze,
Their forms were graceful against the sky,
And wild and beautiful was their cry
As they stood at eve on a hilltop high
With nostrils wide to the breeze. (Stilborn, 1948)*

Eddy

After a year of training, my mother is in charge of twenty children in grades one to eight. She has not been given any special teaching strategies for students who might have challenges. There is an older boy at this school, Eddy, who has unique mannerisms and learning needs, a boy who, in a different period of medicine, might have qualified for an autism diagnosis. A neighbour woman asks my mother how she is getting along with this student. “He’s okay,” she replies. But sometimes he gets on my nerves.” On Monday this boy is not at school, nor is he there on Tuesday. My mother telephones to a tearful parent who says, “I heard what you said about my son,” and then who loudly hangs up the telephone. My mother walks a mile through the snow to the boy’s farm. When

Eddy's mother opens the door, my mother says, her lips trembling, "I'm very sorry. I did say that. When I'm tired, any of the children get on my nerves. I like your son, and I want him back at school." Difficult words to say, yet they bring relief. Eddy is back in class the next day. My mother's emotion in the telling and retelling of this tale is palpable.

My mother has learned an important lesson, and, through her telling and retelling of this story, so have I. No longer is she the only one whose eyes are damp at the close of her stories. In adulthood, I cannot tell any of these stories without feeling the emotion my mother connects to them. And that is one of the legacies my mother has provided: not only do I have these intergenerational family stories, but I have absorbed the emotional background that accompanies them in her telling.

Personal Reading and Writing Experiences

In retrospect, as a child I never questioned the characters in *Heidi* and *The Secret Garden*, books I read where secondary characters with physical disabilities experience 'miracle cures.' I also gluttonously devoured folktales where, as R. G. Thomson (1997) states, "the disabled body is almost always a freakish spectacle presented by the mediating narrative voice" (p. 10). To me, critical thought about the absences of people with disabilities, in depictions as 'people,' was my own personal 'null curriculum' (Eisner, 2002), important in the way null curriculum can be used to make connections between its lack and later occurrence (Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986).

What prompts a person to move from the null to a different vantage point that sees what's missing? What, in Canadian children's fiction, has informed particular authors who are now writing about realistic characters with special needs, while other authors still rely on stereotypes? What informs teachers who have learned to embrace all students within their classrooms as equal members of the community, while other teachers prefer to include and exclude according to traditional templates? In my case, the connections between unawareness, exclusion of difference, and the embracing of differences, occur through stories read alongside a deepening understanding of stories heard and lived.

In a book review written in early 2001 for *The Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, I talk about Gilmore's (2000) picture-book *A Screaming Kind of Day*, then a recent Governor General's Award winner for children's fiction (text). "Coupled with artist Gordon Sauve's rich, expressive illustrations, it's easy to see why this book is a winner," I state, using quotations from the book that include Scully's first person narrative to incorporate the deliberate use of her hearing aid. I remember paging through the book again and again, delighting in the vibrant characterization of a little girl who is hearing impaired, the heightened sensory images in the book, and its appeal to children through the depiction of a little girl with emotions reminiscent of Max in Sendak's (1963) classic *Where the Wild Things Are*.

In a book review written in late 2005 for *The Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, I include Porter's (2005) title *The Crazy Man* in my list of top 10 new books to share with children, describing it as "an unusually gritty story, accessible to a

wide range of ages and reading abilities, told in free verse.” I remark on key aspects of Emaline and Angus’s characterization—that Emaline has been injured by her father in a tractor accident, and Angus is a patient from the town’s mental institution hired as a farm hand after Emaline’s father disappears—and suggest that they are united by the town’s ostracism with regard to their circumstances. I recall marvelling at the exquisite portrayals here of characters society has branded as disabled, as well as the spare, evocative language.

These two books, *A Screaming Kind of Day* and *The Crazy Man*, became important to me as I further considered the lack of books available to young readers about characters with disabilities. Although my own work does not lean towards similar plots or characterizations, these books became, to repeat a term I have introduced in Pamela Porter’s portrait within this dissertation, ‘triggering towns’ for my own writing. I remember retrieving Gilmore’s title from my shelf, in 2003, wondering how I could find books ‘just like this’ written for older students, to include in the revision of Saskatchewan English Language Arts curriculum. At that time, *Wild Orchid* was just beginning to take shape as a novel about a young woman with autism where I specifically wanted autism to be just one aspect of Taylor’s character, just as Gilmore (2000) had depicted a little girl with diverse traits in *A Screaming Kind of Day*.

Porter’s book, along with DiCamillo’s (2001) *The Tiger Rising*, offered the opportunity of a developing friendship between two characters of diverse backgrounds and descriptions who, in some way, were both treated as the ‘other’ within local contexts. I was conscious of the feelings projected in these books,

and wanted to achieve a similar ‘feel’ in my intermediate novel *The Moon Children*, also a story of an unlikely yet satisfying friendship. That Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter created titles that became ‘triggering towns’ in the development of my fiction made this dissertation all the more meaningful to me as I have had the opportunity to include them in this journey: two social activists whose work has definitely influenced mine on a landscape of traditional and contemporary children’s literature.

As I explore the underpinnings of my writing in *Wild Orchid* (2005), its external chronotope carries me to childhood summers spent in Prince Albert National Park, a location that resounds with clarity in my mind’s eye; its external chronotope also lifts me back in time, resonating with my mother’s intergenerational family stories. Closer to home, I navigate through the days in 2003 when, at work on a revision of Saskatchewan curricula, I discovered the absence of fictional resources about characters with disabilities. I shift into my own teaching experiences, thinking of particular students whose lives have intersected with mine, nudging further my conceptualizations of difference and diversity. Two of these students are Brianna and Dan.

Brianna

I was teaching in a primary classroom two afternoons per week. It was October, and I had grown used to the routine of expectations the regular classroom teacher placed upon me, and the expectations I placed on myself, in relation to our ongoing curriculum development. There was a child in the classroom, Brianna, who had multiple disabilities, and who had been assigned a

teacher associate to assist with the delivery of her alternate program. How the inclusion of a student with special needs had been managed, in the afternoons I spent in the classroom, was that I would teach the rest of the class and Shirley, a wonderful woman in her mid thirties, would work with Brianna. On this particular fall day, I entered the classroom to see three students gathered around Brianna, and no Shirley.

On further investigation, I learned that Shirley was absent from school that afternoon, and no sub was available. I swallowed, panic rising in my throat. I had never actually worked with Brianna. She had always remained at the back of the classroom, with Shirley, and to tell the truth I had only a minimal idea what they did there together.

This day proved to be very important in my teaching career. I realized that, as a teacher, I had been acting as if one student in my classroom was not present. Tensions between my lived story and my mother's story burned. How could I believe in the importance of every learner, and at the same time operate like this?

It was obvious that in addition to not considering this learner, I had unthinkingly fallen into common classroom practice at that time by allowing a paraprofessional complete jurisdiction in the program of a student with special needs. And I had done so without paying attention to how such a decision fit with my own value system. I had neither considered my role as Brianna's teacher, nor any subject matter with which to engage her. I worked hard to change my position with Brianna and her classmates through the course of that school year, and I now

make connections between my epiphany in teaching Brianna and my mother's wisdom with Eddy. My mother's persistence in engaging Eddy's mother towards his return to school demonstrates her belief that all students have the right to be viewed as learners, and, as well, that students' differences do not affect their value in the classroom community.

As a result of the tension between my mother's story and my own, I developed multiple methods of engaging Brianna in the school setting. Sometimes, I asked Shirley to work with other students, while I worked with Brianna. Sometimes Brianna and I worked with other students. Sometimes Brianna and Shirley and other students worked together. Sometimes Brianna and her friends worked all together, and Shirley and I assisted, as needed. Sometimes Brianna's friends helped her, and sometimes she helped them.

By treating Brianna as null, and being allowed to do so, I had demonstrated how powerful teachers can be in designating to whom, as well as to what, classrooms pay attention. Difficult as a story like this is for a teacher to admit, for me it inspired tremendous professional growth. Brianna taught me that children have important lessons to offer the adults privileged to work with them. Teachers and learners together can explore regions of curriculum which have been previously neglected, and reap tremendous rewards. In classrooms, change is always possible.

Dan

When I met Dan, I was a new teacher working with a large and diverse class of middle years' students in a rural school division. His inconsistencies were

mystifying. He was bright with a very advanced vocabulary, and seemed to have intact the basic academic skills. Yet most days he would defy even my simplest instructions. Our first morning of school together, he remained silently sullen at his desk during an independent assignment. When asked why he wasn't doing the work, his response was: "Because it's bullshit."

"He's a monster," I was told by others in the school whose only advice was to take as many sick days as I could. I quickly enrolled in a behaviour management course at the local university, hoping it wasn't too late. Maybe I could learn enough to salvage the rest of the year. But although the course focus on behaviour modification was somewhat successful with the class in general, with Dan it was of very little help.

The culmination of events that fall was an event on the playground which propelled Dan into the principal's office, with me as a reluctant witness. He had broken a safety contract designed the previous year and reviewed by the principal earlier this month, and must suffer the consequences, which involved getting "the strap." I was made to observe as the principal produced the leather belt and gave him three swift raps across the palm. I saw his colour rise and his facial muscles contract with each blow. Before me wasn't a monster; he was just a little boy. The failure evident to me wasn't his in breaking a school rule. It was ours as an educational system that wasn't meeting his needs.

He and I left the office, both powerless in our worlds, both fighting tears. As time went on, I tried to find out more about Dan's background. I learned he lived with a single parent who was away most of the time, even on weekends.

Siblings lived in another province. His preference was for gin but he drank beer. He had a keen interest in geography and a smart sense of humour. When the windows were broken in a local seniors' centre, everyone thought Dan had done it. Maybe he had. He looked thin and pale, as if he never got enough exercise or fresh air. And later, as a mother myself, I wondered what he was eating those days, mealtimes spent alone. The school counsellor, who began meeting regularly with Dan, assured me that he liked school and he liked me. "Then why is he so difficult?" I asked, and she had no answers. It was a time when no one in schools mentioned mental illness in relation to children, but I have often wondered since if Dan's environment combined with other factors had produced childhood depression.

I read to the class for the first part of every afternoon, and I noticed that Dan listened hungrily. It became evident that this was the only part of the day when I could count on his respect for me and the other students. After we finished Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, a book I loved, he asked to borrow it. It was the first book he read diligently during Silent Reading. I have often mused about its appeal. Was it the humour? Was it the fact that Fudge, the youngest in the family, as he was, lived in a warm nuclear family the opposite of Dan's?

One day Dan came to school and told me it was to be his last day with us. He and his mother were moving. I couldn't believe the suddenness of this transition. Why had his mother never phoned the school to give us time to prepare for his departure? I tried to contact her during the day's classes, but to no avail.

She had never taken my calls before; why should this day be any exception? I yearned to bargain for a little more time, but did not have the opportunity.

“See ya,” Dan said roughly as he left the classroom, overtly leaving behind the bag we had packed containing his school things. I chased after him and pressed something into his hands. It wasn’t the school supplies, as he had likely expected. It was my copy of the book. The book we had both liked. “This is for you,” I said, and the look in his eyes was not one of gratitude. It was clearly incredulity; he knew how difficult he had been for me in this class. Yet I had given him something precious to me, something that he knew that I knew he admired. Maybe I actually liked him? That last image of Dan is eclipsed by a picture of the horses running beside the train, a moment of transformation, and then he was gone. Now, pondering the connection with Dan, I think back to my mother’s stories about teaching, and about my beliefs regarding learner, milieu, teacher, and subject matter, and the ways my mother’s landscapes intersect with mine. My mother’s sensitivity to, and support of, diversity, is a theme appearing again and again within our intergenerational family stories.

Connecting to the Present

The external chronotope surrounding my published work for children draws me as a time traveler back into my mother’s past, smudges the lines between her life and mine. The social explorations of my consciousness of writing about characters with disabilities offers understandings of a crucial point for me, with three revelations conjoined. Reflections about the few available and inspirational books about characters with disabilities, an understanding of the

general absence of these books on school landscapes, and an awareness of real students with diverse perspectives and needs, offered both performativity and agency as I wrote my way into *Wild Orchid* and then, two years later, created *The Moon Children*—both novels resonant with Saskatchewan landscapes.

When I think about why reading matters, I first remember the delight I took in holding close my own children when they were toddlers and emergent readers, sharing pictures and text which pleased the eye and ear. The bond that was created during shared reading experiences was, and is, very strong. My children are now teenagers, and I still enjoy offering my thoughts on something I am reading, eliciting their evaluations of popular texts, and, on occasion, round-robin reading a story around the dinner table. At bedtime, we sometimes even return to old habits, crowding into the parental bed and sharing aloud a title new to the family shelf.

It's all about us: what touches the heart in what we are reading; what we fail to understand; what we understand only too well. Because of the connections we make, to what we read, and, through this, to each other, we have become an important reading club, my family and I, just as my students and I became important to each other through books we shared in the classroom.

“Tell that story about the boy who got the strap,” my six-year-old son says, looking rosy from his bath. “And how you gave him that book.” I pull him into my lap, his pajamas soft and snug against my arms. Who says we—parents, teachers, storytellers, writers—cannot change the world?

Group Portrait: Rachna, Pamela, and Me

The elements that I have chosen to foreground in this group portrait of Rachna Gilmore, Pamela Porter, and me, were designed to delineate temporality, social context, and place with regard to the external chronotopes emerging through our considerations of what has informed our writing for children. It is important to note that such a group portrait can only render a “re-presentation” (Ellsworth, 1997) of the influences we attribute to the construction of our books, considerably mediated by my own interpretive processes, and theirs, with the power of structuring these portraits resting almost entirely with me.

Applying aspects of critical literacy to the portraiture allows a consideration of what is absent from these portraits, just as my discussion of contemporary Canadian children’s books illuminated themes and details missing from that body of work. There are innumerable questions I could have, and possibly should have, asked these authors as well as directed towards my own personal narratives. An examination of the final portraits offers that while considerable energy went into considerations of childhood memories, little scrutiny has been given to more contemporary influences. What in our current lives offers points of reference for the themes we explore? What epiphanies might we identify in our respective journeys with newly created characters?

Sensitivities regarding ethics curbed initial forays into more recent territory. As I examine our group portrait, I am well aware of questions asked and answered that do not emerge in this discussion. Readers may be less aware of any ‘null curriculum’ (Eisner, 2002) in this regard, and for this reason I encourage a

stance of questioning beyond the scaffold that is presented here, that openness to further possibility in other times and places might inspire other explorations, with alternate subjects and participants, that may lead to further resonance.

Motion and Stopped Time

A conceptualization of the influences on our writing goes back, in all three cases, to early life experiences that have shaped our personal identities. Rachna's writing appears as an iteration of her own experiences as a 'visible minority,' and she demonstrates a heightened consciousness to characters that have, at one time in books, experienced life on the fringes. Pamela offers a similar backwards/forwards consciousness as she considers early counterstories perceived and acted upon in opposition to dominant culture. I am drawn back in time to a childhood spent in the richness of my mother's stories, tales that intersect with my own stories lived and told. All three of us engage in critical literacy to various extents through disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues, actualizing the fourth dimension of critical literacy—taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

We have all been influenced by books. *Anne of Green Gables* prompted Rachna to travel to Prince Edward Island, looking for the 'safe place' promised by Montgomery's fiction. Rachna also reported noticing the dearth of particular characters in fiction, and fashioning her own on themes related to belonging. From reading Hesse's (1997) *Out of the Dust*, Pamela recognized the potential of the verse novel in telling the story she was brewing for *The Crazy Man*; Pamela

also became more conscious of her own counter story by childhood reading of Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a book that continues to lay foundations for Pamela's current writing. I began considering fiction about characters with disabilities because I noticed the lack of diversity among published texts as well as a few stellar examples of work that was, I thought, radically changed from classic fiction. In addition, all three of us reported entrancement in childhood reading, and particular books that captured our hearts and imaginations, as well as a reproduction of this kind of entrancement during the writing process.

Our recursive thinking addresses stopped time with the creation of new characters, in settings and plots of our own design. One shared characteristic of our writing processes appeared to be the 'entrancement' that we experience within the world of our imagined characters. Another shared characteristic is that our writing does not consistently rely on outlines, supporting a statement by Sumara (2002) that indicates "most writers of fiction explain that they do not usually know the shape and trajectory of their work until near the end of the process" (p. 156).

Rachna reports a preference for the first person voice, as it is more immediate. Pamela indicates that, for her, poetry is a form that through its very conciseness speaks volumes while at the same time allowing readers an active role in filling in gaps. I have considered my work in the manner it addresses 'null curriculum' (Eisner, 2002), filling the void. All three of us create stories, and then conduct research, as two interconnected stages of the writing process, our stances as writers supporting the shift in concentration; and it is this research that offers

integrity to our writing, allows us confidence in finally committing the stories to a publisher for their final journey towards permanence.

Social Context

The three of us acknowledge our work as social expression, focusing to varied extents on disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and socio-political issues—three dimensions of critical literacy discussed by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002). Rachna intentionally offers readers windows and mirrors. Pamela responds to ‘triggering towns.’ My work is influenced by exposure to other social activists, including my mother, whose work has made me conscious of what I want my own to achieve. We three authors have not been writing in a vacuum but with the knowledge that readers will share our work, along with a desire to affect, in some way, changes to these readers and to the wider world. This desire for our books to have transformative effects relates to another dimension of critical literacy—taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

All three of us have been influenced by real people—a child with a hearing impairment whose presence as a previous tenant in Rachna’s home offers mysterious encouragement; Pamela’s reminiscence from a man who remembers the kindness of a farm hand stigmatized by mental illness; my own experiences in schools where children with special needs have appeared as complex and vibrant characters on the classroom landscape. The chronotopes external to our writing move us inwards and outwards, clarifying self-image while at the same time opening possibilities for exploring other perspectives. Rachna attends to issues of

acceptance; Pamela explores the resilience of characters adapting to changing life circumstances; I respond to the need for protagonists who carry disabilities alongside other character traits. We look at the people who have populated our books and see other people, in other times and landscapes, looking back. Ghosts, perhaps, of our past lives, and also harbingers of a distant future.

A Sense of Place

All three of us acknowledge a strong sense of place in our work, locations that have shifted us in real as well as figurative terms, towards the work that we do. The beaches of Prince Edward Island figure prominently in Rachna's depiction of Zilla and her landscape; shadows of Weyburn haunt Pamela's fictive Saskatchewan town where a mental hospital looms large on the horizon; Prince Albert National Park offers its own wild orchids that operate as metaphors for Taylor's autistic characteristics in *Wild Orchid*. We are clearly taking action as Canadians, emphasizing our local landscapes in what we write.

Resonance and Momentum

The external chronotopes of our work thus move us backwards and forwards, inwards and outwards, and through the configurations of real and imagined contexts, offering a resonance that enriches our personal identities through its collection and presentation of elements of our storied pasts. The examination our work has allowed with regard to our past experiences confirms what Luce-Kapler (2004) says about writing as transformation: "In writing, just by describing an experience, I perceive that event differently and may suggest

other directions, other paths—the potentials of the sideshadow. Writing about that moment has changed it” (p. 95).

Along with resonance for us as authors, it becomes possible that the context in which our writing has taken place may offer a resonance for readers, enriching what we have to say through an understanding of why and how these messages were wrought. The resonance of the external chronotope with regard to our published texts has the potential to add momentum for educators in considering particular texts for classroom study as well as including critical literacy perspectives in classrooms. The portraiture included in this dissertation may thus operate as a ‘triggering town’ for educators, becoming a place in which readers recognize elements of their own teaching lives and affecting their agency within critical literacy frameworks as well as their performativity with particular texts.

That all three authors demonstrate social activism with respect to their inclusion of perspectives not often encountered in children’s books can be attributed to particular conditions that have influenced their work. A conceptualization of classrooms that offer multiple perspectives and ways of knowing promotes a related social awareness rather than a reproduction of the status quo, exemplifying Freire’s ‘pedagogy of love’ (1983; 1991; 1998). It is interesting that the portraiture represents an aspect of critical literacy not encompassed through simply reading the children’s books in the study sample. While the books, to varying extents, represent disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues, three

dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002), it is only through an exploration of the authors and their writing that the fourth dimension—taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002)—could be addressed. Critical classroom pedagogy will be further explored in Chapter Six through the implications of this study.

CHAPTER SIX: THE FRAMED PORTRAITS IN CONTEXT

My Research Journey as a Portraitist

In selecting and completing the portraiture included in this dissertation, I have followed the intent of Lawrence-Lightfoot and J. H. Davis (1997) in “hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified” (p. 14). My choice to set the author portraits in what evolved as a panoramic frame of 50 contemporary Canadian children’s novels about characters with disabilities has offered the opportunity of considering further the goals of critical literacy and connecting to classroom landscapes the inclusion of texts about characters with disabilities. In addition, my experiences with the authors and the sample texts influenced my own personal thoughts regarding ‘disability’ and ‘inclusion.’

My Shifting Conceptualization of ‘Special Education’ and ‘Disability’

Encouraged to consider, through acts of critical reflection, aspects of my own practice that might be discriminatory (Freire, 1983), as I journeyed through this dissertation I began to question a number of terms commonly used by me and others. One of these terms is ‘special education,’ because it immediately brings to mind ‘regular education,’ which then creates a boundary between two hemispheres of teaching that I see as very much connected. In my experience, the strategies I discovered in ‘special education’ circles have all been very useful in general classroom contexts, with students labelled as having ‘special education

needs' as well as students without these labels or needs. The difficulty with 'special education' terminology is that it creates a barrier that is sometimes difficult to shift towards the promise of inclusion; the term 'special education' does, however, support funding for enhanced programs, a matter of positive political, rather than social, perceptivity.

Another word I questioned is 'disability,' and, I wondered whether it is a term that is representative of linguistically ableist sentiments. I have not yet ascertained a better term in the context of public usage, however I do believe that someday another, more appropriate term, will be found. In the discussion that follows, I have modified the word to dis/ability, as I think this format highlights the split nature of disability and ability, with both requiring a co-joined space in our thinking.

I conceptualize my mother's stories about Johnny, Old Jones, and Eddy as frameworks through which I have identified aspects of the learner, the milieu, and the teacher, absorbing beliefs which remain constant in my own life as a curriculum maker. There is a common thread among them, and this same thread connects to other stories my mother tells and retells. Dis/ability is clearly indicated as the way the world navigates us; we are both defined and interrupted by the world while it identifies us as dis/abled. Johnny, a new learner in a new land, was labelled and dis/abled by the classroom community. Old Jones was set adrift in a social milieu that both spurned and welcomed him. Eddy was an enigma in the classroom and in his wider circumstance, and the teacher's role in his re-invention as a valued member of the school community was, in this case,

the persistent link that kept him coming to school. Within these stories, I have processed aspects of the commonplaces--the learner, the milieu, and the teacher—which allow me to create and recreate my own classroom landscapes. One important message in this regard relates to the possibility that ‘paying attention’ to these commonplaces, in light of social justice issues, can have tremendous impact on the resulting curriculum.

As a learner, Johnny represents populations of marginalized people who traditionally have not held positions which influence curriculum making. Educators in school have opportunities to address this marginalization and eliminate negative boundaries, enlisting all participants in the curriculum making process. Educators have the privilege and the duty to “unveil truths” (Freire, 1998, p. 76) through acts of critical reflection. Such critical reflection is something each teacher must consider independently of classroom tradition, as I discovered in my experiences with Brianna.

While not always transparent in the manner in which it operates, milieu can be held accountable for the attitudes of its subjects, as both the stories of Brianna and Old Jones demonstrate. Yet I believe that a reason for a problem is not an excuse for allowing the problem to continue. Teachers have a great deal of authority in determining the stance of classroom curriculum, and an examination of what is and what is not spoken about can be very valuable. For my mother, Eddy ran the risk of becoming ‘null curriculum’ (Eisner, 2002): that which is not part of the classroom repertoire. My mother’s persistence in preventing Eddy from disappearing into the netherland of a farm home says a great deal about my

mother's stance as a teacher. She believed in teaching all students, thinking that all were of equal importance on the classroom landscape; further, she actualized a belief that the whole of the student body were the classroom landscape, that teaching meant teaching them as a unified whole.

The fourth curriculum commonplace—resources—evolved for me, with respect to books about characters with disabilities, as an aspect of 'null curriculum' (Eisner, 2002) that I associated with the absences of disability images in school resources. An awareness of this absence emerged throughout my teaching career, culminating in my experiences with the curriculum advisory committee which then ignited my first research question towards this dissertation and, in fact, inspired my return to university for doctoral studies.

I see the wild horses as a metaphor for Johnny, for Old Jones, for Eddy, and for anyone straddling the awkwardness of multiple identities, a state which reflects all of us at one time or another. I am a writer, a daughter, a mother, a teacher, and while sometimes these roles intersect, at other times they do not. The arts can thus "awaken us to the alternative possibilities of existing, of being human, of relating to others, of *being* other..." (Greene, 1993, p. 214). Classroom resources such as children's literature are, in my view, an incredibly important medium through which to transform individuals and societies through Freire's (1983, 1991, 1998) pedagogy of love.

In their reflection of dis/ability, the horses in my mother's poem were dis/abled by circumstance: the great Depression caused their food supplies to dwindle and yet, when the train whistle blew, they were as spirited and vibrant as

could be imagined. Clandinin and Connelly (1992) offer a definition of teachers as “curricle” drivers, implying that teachers command the race horse of the regency. We hold in our hands the reins which direct classroom communities on the roads taken into the wider world—a world that both impacts, and is impacted, by all of us. And while we drive, the children run ahead, or alongside, or sometimes lag behind—straddling invisible lines drawn by the school and wider community. Paley (1992) talks about how some children never learn to feel as if they belong in classrooms, and particular attention to resources can erase the lines that marginalize students at school, working to erase, in turn, the lines that still appear within communities.

The Employment of ‘Internal’ and ‘External’ Chronotopes as Lenses

My employment of Bakhtin’s (1981) literary chronotope in terms of a lens to examine the ‘internal chronotope’ within texts, and the ‘external chronotope’ foregrounding influences that have informed the writing processes of authors, proved useful in expanding the categories for content analysis from original categories that emerged in the pilot study and initial exploration of children’s books. Further differentiation of each of these chronotopic lenses through an application of narrative inquiry’s ‘three-dimensional space’ that involves the temporal, social context, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was especially fruitful. The view thus offered through the lenses of the ‘internal chronotope’ and the ‘external chronotope’ broadened the scope of my dual focus on children’s books and the three authors involved in the portraiture, offering rich data from which intriguing patterns and themes emerged.

My decision to utilize Bakhtin's work was not made lightly. In my graduate courses, I had encountered Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) as a radical theorist of language and literature whose ideas have influenced literary studies, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and social theory. While I initially found his ideas regarding dialogism as evocative, his work originally seemed too heavy for application to what I determined would be portraiture delicate enough to carry productively onto school landscapes. As I continued to consider the applications of Bakhtin's work to mine, I realized that while many scholars have concentrated on panoramic views of Bakhtin, other scholars have applied portions of his ideas to various subjects of analysis (Hitchcock, 2008; Holquist, 2002). It was through my developing sense of the flexibility of the conceptualization of the chronotope that I began to foresee how versions of the chronotope might be positioned as useful lenses within my research.

The process for applying narrative inquiry's three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to my work in terms of a cultivation of "multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same" (Greene, 1995, p. 16) operated in a similar manner to how I diffused the conceptualization of Bakhtin's chronotope from the enormity of the rest of his work. While I considered that narrative inquiry as a research design would not allow me the stance I required to address both of my research questions, as I progressed into the study I became aware that time and space, the categories of Bakhtin's chronotope that I was drawn to consider, needed specificity if they were to assist me in satisfactorily delineating aspects of the children's books and the

authors' experiences. As I began to explore the juxtaposition of time, social context, and place—categories from narrative inquiry—alongside the time-space conceptualization within Bakhtin's chronotope, I visualized how a blend might work for me in terms of the type of lenses I was seeking for my study.

Relationships with the Subjects of the Portraiture

While I was originally conscious of the delicate nature of working with human participants in research, through my conversations with Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter I became more deeply aware of how “stories of self are risky for the teller” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 252). As I progressed with transcripts and research texts, offering both authors opportunities for extensive review (Zeller, 1995, p. 87), it became evident that many aspects of our dialogues were concerning for one or the other of the authors, in contrast to my initial thoughts that since the transcripts were reproduced verbatim, there would only be minor retrospective changes.

Part of what I learned is how, through reading our thoughts, we all became aware of what we wanted to say and the difference between this and what we actually said. This relates to the idea that “language is not transparent or apolitical but a site where discursive struggles occur” (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 14) and moves researchers “beyond regarding a story as a fixed entity” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 251). The reviewing of the written descriptions of experiences allowed us to perceive events differently and suggested other direction for consideration (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 95). It is possible that authors who have had considerable previous experiences presenting and re-presenting their thoughts on particular

subjects may be more critical of field texts and, in this way, my journey from field texts to research texts may have been particularly unique. Other participants who have not had previous experiences with revisionary processes may have fewer skills to apply in the reconsideration of field texts, and this has implications for studies where researchers are seeking to enlist research subjects as full participants.

In engaging Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter in telling the indepth stories that emerged as part of our conversations, I found it helpful to offer stories of my own that illuminated particular aspects of my writing. My stories seemed to connect to a particular style of examining a lived life that, in turn, inspired stories offering historical detail and context for particular elements of the authors' contemporary writing. Through the sharing of our stories I reflected on the importance of developing reciprocal relationships between participants and researchers in studies where indepth exploration of personal issues is desired. This paralleled Coles' (1989) experiences of the benefits of sharing his stories with patients in what had originally been a one-sided relationship.

Through my journey with the two authors I involved in the portraiture, and with my mother whose stories figure prominently in my self-portraiture, I also reflected on the value of trust, as there were particular revelations offered that became important for reasons of ethics not to include. Such ethics pertained to the respect I had offered both authors as participants in the study, as well as my consideration for my mother's personal stories, and my promise not to include anything in the dissertation with which any of us would be uncomfortable.

Findings, Relevance to Literature, and Implications

Research Question One

Emerging Patterns Among Books in the Study Sample

Viewed through an internal chronotopic lens, differentiated with attention to the temporal, social context, and place, this study illuminates interesting patterns in the depictions of characters with disabilities within the Canadian children's novels that comprised the study sample. These patterns were intriguing in the manner in which they reflect the exclusion as well as the inclusion of particular elements.

This body of literature excluded many elements of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999) with the exception of 'changing perspectives' that appear through the depiction of characters with disabilities as well as some aspects related to 'changing boundaries' and a few rare examples of 'changing forms and formats'. This finding regarding the limited inclusion of Radical Change elements supports Dresang's theory of the way that changes in literature for young people sprout up from the horizontal, root-like structure of the children's literature 'rhizome': "here and there...connected yet heterogeneous, and in a nonlinear manner" (p. xviii). Contemporary iterations of classic texts disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, and focus on socio-political issues—three dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) that make these books important as classroom resources. Particular authors have also remained aloof from much of contemporary literature in terms of the Radical Change phenomenon described by Eliza Dresang (1999). Eventually, however, work

about characters with disabilities will move from new and provocative to “fundamental” as “other meanings of radical take over” (Dresang, 1999, p. xviii).

While including a number of Canadian settings, mentioning many provinces by name, the study texts did not make mention of Alberta other than indirectly through a reference to a ‘western province,’ and none of Canada’s territories—Yukon, Nunuvut, or the Northwest Territories—were given specific address. In contrast, Ontario was mentioned 12 times, with seven of these references directed towards Toronto. This finding has implications for a consideration of place in classroom resources, offering educators insight into particular patterns that may be reflected in other ways. Further research is necessary to pursue this vein of information, asking whether place names in texts are a result of where writers live or whether the use of particular place names arises from marketing and involves the targeting of a particular audience.

The texts in the study sample also gravitated towards intermediate and young adult audiences, with only two novels specifically targeted at junior readers ages eight to 11. In addition, fantasy and mystery novels were genres only minimally addressed, with realistic and historical fiction offering standard frameworks within the study sample. It is important that educators designing curriculum for children in the eight to 11 age group be aware of the lack of children’s fiction presenting characters with disabilities and work to accommodate attention to issues regarding disability in alternate ways.

Sociopolitical issues emerged in relation to my journey locating the study sample of 50 children’s books that included characters with disabilities. As

implied by my discussion of the pilot study, as well as from my discussion of the data collected for the dissertation itself, locating Canadian children's books about characters with disabilities was not an easy task. Databases such as *Books in Print* do not differentiate between Canadian and other sources, and library searches continually turned up non-fiction as well as fiction titles.

Other sociopolitical issues arose regarding the database descriptions of the books themselves, where sometimes ableist language occurred. For example, the Edmonton Public Library's catalogue uses the phrase 'suffers from' in the indication of Asperger's Syndrome for Taylor in Brenna's (2005) *Wild Orchid* as well as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome for Billy in Brenna's (2007) *The Moon Children*. In addition, Pauline in Carter's (2001) *In the Clear* is described as a 'victim' of polio. On the back cover of Walters's *Rebound*, the central character, David, is described as 'confined to a wheelchair.'

In addition to implications for educators, a number of implications can be drawn, from this study, for authors of children's books. Authors interested in depicting diversity in texts are encouraged to include various configurations of characters with disabilities in their work, particularly for junior ages groups eight to 11, making mention of specific Canadian places, including the Territories, as well as weaving ethnic diversity, and differences in sexual orientation, into their characterizations. In addition, authors are encouraged to further explore fantasy and mystery genres previously overlooked in the portrayal of characters with disabilities among the sample texts.

As I considered the books in the study sample, and some of the authors who wrote them, I began to wonder what influence publishers have over the appearance of books about characters with disabilities and what the role of publishers might be in terms of disrupting the commonplace as far as children's books are concerned. Further research into publishers' perceptions of disability within characterizations is recommended as an avenue through which further light may be shed on the complexities of what currently appears as a small but powerful body of literature.

Comparison of Patterns in Contemporary Books to Patterns in Past Texts

Overall, the books in the study sample did not reflect what Keith (2001) describes as the 'kill or cure' mentality of authors writing about characters with disabilities in traditional texts, nor did they illustrate a predominance of particular disabilities, unlike the prominence of polio and blindness in classic literature, the latter reflected in excess of its actual occurrence due to its metaphorical possibilities (Keith, 2001, p. 199). The books in the study sample also included a strong representation of first-person narrators that had disabilities in contrast to a previous propensity of 'second fiddle' books (P. Thomson, 1992, p. 24).

One aspect of books in the study sample that continues to reflect past trends is the nature of a character's disability in relationship to the plot. Disabilities continue to appear as integral to the plots of most of these children's texts, with only seven books depicting characters whose disabilities were simply another aspect of their characterization without operating as a plot device.

Implications of Patterns For the Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy

The view of critical literacy supported by this study relates to particular classroom resources, a vision of why these resources are important, and a version of how these resources might fit into educational frameworks. Critical literacy offers one approach to literacy education that combines understandings of both ‘the word and the world’ (Freire, 1983, 1991). In addition to including classroom texts that reflect all people, promoting Freire’s ‘pedagogy of love’ (1983; 1991; 1998), a critical literacy approach to these texts will support students in developing the skills they need to evaluate, for themselves, the copious amounts of textual materials offered them in the digital age.

Critical literacy, conceptualized within curriculum commonplaces of teacher, learner, milieu, and subject matter (Schwab, 1978)—elements of curriculum that are important in considerations of curriculum development—combines traditional work regarding reading and writing with the practice of critical, social thinking. This practice of critical, social thinking is presented in Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys’ (2002) four dimensions framework regarding critical literacy: “(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice” (p. 382). A number of implications can be drawn from attention to the books in the study sample in terms of the first three of these four dimensions. It is important to note that the fourth dimension of critical literacy noted by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys— ‘taking action and promoting social

justice’—emerged through a discussion of the portraiture. Further exploration of aspects of the fourth dimension of critical literacy will occur later in this chapter.

Disrupting the commonplace may be encouraged as teachers ask students to consider aspects of children’s books of which students might otherwise be unaware. Attention to issues regarding diversity in characterizations is one element of critical literacy that encompasses the portrayal of characters with disabilities. Asking students whether characters with disabilities are presented accurately, fairly, and respectfully, or whether these characters are represented at all in the body of work students are reading, are questions that foreground attention to stereotypes. The trends in classic fiction presented by my review of the literature offer a compelling backdrop for classroom explorations of contemporary texts in terms of elements that demonstrate changing perspectives.

Radical Change (Dresang, 1999) identifies the changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries that appear in contemporary literature. Fiction novels about characters with disabilities can be categorized within Dresang’s notion of children’s literature as a ‘rhizome’ and primarily exhibiting one trait of changing perspectives through the portrayal of particular voices not often encountered in traditional texts.

That the body of work about characters with disabilities will move further into elements of Radical Change is predicted, and educators should be aware of the changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries, on the horizon. Teachers need to be ready with justifications for exploring radically changed literature with students, as it is only through individual

curriculum making that, at this time, books about characters with disabilities are consciously included in schools.

Specific books that involve characters with disabilities may be particularly helpful in encouraging readers to consider how a disruption of the commonplace has occurred within the author's framework. In Porter's (2005) intermediate-age novel *The Crazy Man*, Em learns to see Angus, a man stigmatized by mental illness, in a different way, as do other members of the community. In the author portrait, Pamela Porter discusses a public presentation regarding *The Crazy Man*, after which "many people came up to me with their own psychiatric hospital stories; I think it is a statement to the continuing stigma of mental illness or around an institution that treated, or mis-treated, the mentally ill...it takes someone to give permission and a space to be able to talk about those things."

Pamela indicated a desire to write about a character "who was labelled mentally ill just because he had been admitted to the hospital at one time..." and she "wanted to talk about the notion of what is crazy...who really is 'the crazy man' in the story..." Readers can identify the response of the surrounding community to both Emaline and Angus as the crazy element, disrupting a commonplace idea that people who have been diagnosed with mental illness are somehow 'subhuman'.

One of the 'chronotopic types' described in this dissertation offers opportunities for educators to further explore disrupting the commonplace with students. Rainey in Waldorf's (2008) young adult novel *Tripping* quickly establishes that only one of her distinguishing features is the use of orthopaedic

legs. Her character defies a pattern involving disability as a plot device, and provides readers with a new way to consider the momentum of a fictional character with a disability. The growth of a character during the course of a novel, as well as characters depicted through first-person narration, are elements of disrupting the commonplace that can emerge from discussions of Rainey.

In addition to presenting a single book about characters with a disabilities as a study opportunity, teachers also require ideas for using literature about characters with disabilities in the context of other classroom texts. These books should be integrated alongside other classroom resources, recognizing that “critical literacy should not be viewed as the best or only way of reading, especially when considering the importance of pleasure; that is, the value of purely aesthetic experience” (McDaniel, 2006, p. 155). A focus on characteristics of books beyond the commonplace will assist students in considerations related to their own writing, as well, and teachers can consciously assist students in drawing learnings from one process into another.

Books depicting diversity are thus resources educators may consider to assist students in disrupting the commonplace through critical literacy, although this is traditionally a radical stance for adoption by teachers. Instead, teachers have been associated with a transmission of knowledge that supports the status quo (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Further research is required to explore student responses to classroom activities within the framework of disrupting the commonplace through critical literacy.

Interrogating multiple viewpoints is another dimension of critical literacy that can be supported by a focus on texts about characters with disabilities, as well as their authors, opening possibilities for students who may not have previously considered contrasting points of view. For example, Gilmore's (1995) junior novel *A Friend Like Zilla* includes alternate viewpoints towards a girl with intellectual disabilities. The alternate viewpoints are presented through considerations of Zilla's treatment by her mother, by her new friend Zenobia (Nobby), and by various members of the friend's family including an uncle who demonstrates distinct prejudices against Zilla on the basis of her cognitive profile. The excerpt that follows is told from Nobby's point of view and offers a scene in which Zilla and Nobby overhear Uncle Chad and Aunt Alice talking about Zilla.

"...I simply cannot understand why Audrey encourages Zenobia to play with that girl."

My back prickled.

"Chad, really," cried Aunt Alice.

"Seriously, Alice, do you think Zenobia ought to spend so much time with Zilla?"

"Chad, what an awful thing to say!"

Zilla's eyes were wide. I had to distract her.

"I'm merely saying what everyone's thinking, Alice. After all she can barely read. Of course, we all feel sorry for her, one has to feel sorry for someone like that, but still..."

Zilla made a strangled noise. She half climbed, half dropped from the tree then ran to the farmhouse. (p. 94)

Both Nobby and Uncle Chad learn to see the world, and each other, in a different way, due to their relationship with Zilla. As Rachna and I consider the importance of the theme of acceptance in her work, within her author portrait we are transported back in time to a place where a young girl—Rachna herself—wonders where in the world she might find a safe place, a welcoming community. Rachna continues to explore the theme of acceptance in her work in progress (Gilmore, 2009).

In addition to its support for disrupting a commonplace in terms of the stigma around mental illness, the interrogation of multiple viewpoints is also supported through the portrait of Pamela Porter and her discussions regarding her intermediate novel *The Crazy Man* (2005). This is exemplary of the idea that the four dimensions of critical literacy “are interrelated—none stand alone” (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382). Em, the young female protagonist in *The Crazy Man*, absorbs the different reactions of the town to Angus, a man stigmatized by mental illness. Within the context of this novel, readers are able to examine, just as Em does, a range of opinions regarding Angus, and decide for themselves whose opinion most matches their own.

The exploration of the character of Kyle, one of the ‘literary chronotopic types’ drawn from my study sample of childrens books, also offers opportunities for the examination of multiple viewpoints using the two distinct contrasting patterns that appear in his characterization. On the one hand, Kyle is depicted as a

strong protagonist through the manner in which he grows and changes throughout the course of the story, drawn into despair because of his diabetes induced blindness, but pushing forward in the actualization of hopes and dreams that include a budding romance with Liz.

On the other hand, Kyle is a character who responds performatively as an iteration of classic texts where characters with disabilities are either ‘cured or killed’. In Kyle’s case, just as he envisions a possible future with Liz, he dies. Tensions between these two patterns in characterization are interesting with respect to the consideration of multiple viewpoints as far as characters with disabilities are concerned. In addition, within the novel itself, the responses of other characters towards Kyle provide evidence of diversity in the way people with disabilities may be perceived by other members of society.

Classroom exploration of multiple viewpoints is another aspect of literacy instruction that teachers may find unconventional and uncomfortable (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). This practice of critical literacy works against ‘null curriculum’ (Eisner, 2002) in the manner in which readers are encouraged to locate the substance that is missing from texts and examine potential controversies from differing viewpoints.

Focusing on sociopolitical issues is a dimension of critical literacy that appeared in relation to notable exclusions in the group of children’s novels that comprised my study sample. One such exclusion involved how characters with disabilities lacked a specific ethnicity. Only six of the 64 characterizations were depicted as having ethnic or religious diversity, and in most of these cases the

references were selectively made about the families of the characters with disabilities rather than to the characters themselves. In addition, none of the characters with disabilities were portrayed as gay or lesbian, although a small number of the books did include gay or lesbian characters without disabilities.

In addition to choices regarding the characterization of multiple ‘differences,’ characters with disabilities were also almost entirely presented as single entities within their fiction—rarely did two or more characters with disabilities occupy the same text. Again, further research is necessary to explore rationales for including single or multiple characters with disabilities within particular authors’ texts.

One concerning pattern in the data is that positive portrayals of single fathers were clearly absent from the books in the study sample. While a number of the characters with disabilities were raised by supportive single mothers, the two single fathers presented in the study sample as caregivers were described in negative terms. The depiction of single fathers as they relate to characters with disabilities is a sociopolitical trend to monitor, as it certainly offers a distorted and negatively stereotypical view of parenting by males when special needs are evident in their children.

The books in the study sample appeared reflective of both sexes with equal opportunity for male and female characters with disabilities to appear in a mix of main and secondary positions. These texts offered the interrogation of multiple viewpoints as characters with disabilities narrated their own stories through first-person voices, what Rachna Gilmore describes as getting into a

character's skin and becoming that person (R. Gilmore, personal communication, December 6, 2008). Many of the texts illustrated tensions within the social context of characters with disabilities. The books in the study sample also contained many references to Canadian settings, definitively placing this fiction on local landscapes—one way that a disruption of the commonplace occurred in comparison to classic texts.

There are a number of implications for classroom teaching regarding the sociopolitical issues reflected in various texts within the study sample. Connecting tensions within texts to personal experience can focus on sociopolitical issues both inside and outside the frameworks of narrative. Through an examination of the depictions of characters with disabilities, students can be encouraged to think about, talk about, and write about communities that have positioned people with disabilities in a particular and stereotypical way.

Students who learn about the infrequency of characters with disabilities to occupy protagonist roles in classic texts may be further encouraged to discuss why this might have transpired, and think about the relationship between characterization and unequal power relationships in society. The lack of the appearance of characters with disabilities in fantasy or mystery genres may provide similar fuel for classroom conjecture, as well as a consideration of the limited number of fictional resources for younger age groups about characters with disabilities. Why characters with disabilities are generally presented without differences in ethnicity or sexual orientation is another critical discussion question that may lead to further sociopolitical reflections.

Sociopolitical issues also arise in the manner in which particular characters are interpreted by readers. One of the ‘literary chronotopic types’ that emerged from my exploration of the novels in the study sample involves the characterization of Dopey Colvig, the antagonist of Lawrence’s (2006) Governor General’s Award winning intermediate historical fiction novel *Gemini Summer*. A reading of Dopey’s character, according to reviews of the book, has been unproblematic, with no mention made of the manner in which Dopey is depicted (Bloom, 2006; Bryan, 2006; Bush, 2006; Huntley, 2006; Mouttet, 2007; M. Snyder, 2007). Dopey’s portrayal, resting on the weight of his atypical physical characteristics to explain his negative behaviour, offers a chance for readers to explore the performativity of classic fairy tale elements in a contemporary text. Such performativity impedes critical thinking with regard to the depiction of Dopey who, if introduced in a special education context, would surely raise questions regarding fair representation. The rendering of Dopey as a plot device, emerging as a stereotypical representation of a child with disabilities, has slipped under the radar of book reviewers, and is well worth further exploration with students in classroom settings.

A sociopolitical issue that has been with me since the inception of my research involves the lack, in educational contexts, of literature about people with disabilities. A philosophy of inclusion, applied to schools, emphasizes that school landscapes are places for all children and suggests ‘universal design’ (Orkwis & McLane, 1998) with regard to curriculum. Universal classroom design must include the storied lives of all children, if it is to be truly inclusive. While

disability is an “ordinary” part of human existence (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. ix), it has been “rarely acknowledged as such” (Couser, 2006, p. 399) or “considered as a societal issue in a thoughtful and humane manner” (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. ix). A true landscape of inclusion demonstrates the pedagogy of love Freire discusses as he encourages consideration of both the ‘word and the world’ (1983; 1991, 1998). Only in actualizing such a pedagogy can the ideals of social justice be realized.

Taking students beyond simple personal responses to texts into sociopolitical frameworks is a difficult task for teachers (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002), especially when teachers have not established aspects of personal agency with relation to societal evaluation and change. Aspects of books about characters with disabilities lend themselves to the task of supporting teachers as well as students as they begin to consider sociopolitical systems and relationships of power in society. The patterns and trends apparent within my sample of books that portray characters with disabilities, as well as the influences that have informed their authors, emerge as incredibly supportive tools through which to support considerations regarding the role of teacher, learner, milieu and subject matter within contemporary curriculum.

Research Question Two

Background Experiences of Authors Related to their Construction of Characters with Disabilities

As illuminated by my initial conversation with Jean Little, and confirmed through the author portraiture, there are interesting stories behind the work of

writers engaged in producing children's fiction. As such, these stories offer a perspective on taking action and promoting social justice—one dimension of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) that can be instrumental for teachers engaged in classroom approaches that support students' critical literacy development.

Rachna Gilmore's picture book *A Screaming Kind of Day* and her junior novel *A Friend Like Zilla*, Pamela Porter's intermediate novel *The Crazy Man*, and my own intermediate novel *The Moon Children* as well as my young adult title *Wild Orchid* imply external chronotopes in terms of author renderings of time and space significant to the creation and consideration of these texts. The portraits of all three authors delineate movement in time, specify social context, and address a solid preoccupation with place, findings that re-present our work in light of particular influences.

Rachna's identification as a member of a visible minority group who envisions books as both mirrors and windows (Galda, 1998), Pamela's propensity to act and tell counterstories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995), and my employment of perspectives from my mother's storytelling, are all related to decisions to take action and promote social justice—one dimension of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). In numerous ways, the author portraits reflect aspects of how and why individual authors have disrupted the commonplace, interrogated multiple viewpoints, and focused on sociopolitical issues in their work—three other dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

Resonance of Author Portraits in Null Curriculum

Null curriculum (Eisner, 2002) is a term I have used to describe the absence, on school landscapes, of educational themes relating to disability. More specifically, within the context of this study, I have alluded to books about characters with disabilities as entering into null curriculum and filling an important space in what has previously been left unrecognized. I associate thoughts of a null curriculum with an experience my mother relates from her storied past:

When I was a little girl, my father would ask me, “What do you know today?”

“Nothing,” I would answer.

“You’ll find that down cellar behind the apple barrel,” my father would say. I would go to look. I would creep down to the bottom of the dark cellar stairs, and reach through the shadows—we had no electric lights—until I had felt my way all around the mysterious apple barrel. There was nothing there! But next time my father asked, I would look again. (M. Stilborn, personal communication, September, 2008)

The interesting thing about null is that it implies that someday something might be altered, empty might be full. Null is indeed a provocative placeholder, and one that offers a wealth of possibility for what has been missing from educational pedagogy. Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, a desire to remedy null curriculum, in addition to my recognition of Rachna and Pamela as social activists, has encouraged the presentation of the author portraits

as a ‘triggering town’ (Hugo, 1979) for educators engaged in curriculum making as well as for researchers planning future studies. In this manner, the portraits themselves are a form of social action designed to support social justice through critical literacy ideals.

Implications of Author Portraits Regarding Classroom Curriculum

One message for educators, implied by this portraiture, is that books and stories arise from particular landscapes which may be important to authors and readers. While books and stories about characters with disabilities may engage students in three of the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002), it is attention to the authors themselves that illuminates how writing may be a form of **taking action and promoting social justice**. An understanding of authorial intent may thus support students in taking action towards the promotion of social justice through the consideration of writing as a tool for social justice goals. Investigations of the influences that have informed a writer’s work establish connections that offer the potential for resonance in terms of ‘triggering towns’ (Hugo, 1979)—understandings that may inspire students in telling their own counterstories.

The portraits of Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter also have implications in terms of the themes of social activism that drive much of their work. While both authors are well respected in their field, winning Governor General’s Awards for children’s fiction, among other honours, they cite specific, personal influences in backgrounds that have clearly informed their practice: issues of identity and belonging with respect to diversity, particularly transformative books by other

authors, and aspects of their writing processes that oppose ‘traditional’ methods of outlining and conducting research.

Educators must consciously seek to address the role of curriculum in supporting a perception of “persons as interdependent rather than as isolated and independent” (Slattery, 1995, p. 19), implying the significance of using different frames of reference to develop empathy (Kincheloe, 1993). Educational practice encourages the participation of children with diverse learning needs in co-operative school settings, yet, without reimagining inclusion and diversity, without curriculum that reflects all children, we cannot hope for inclusive practice. Our attention to curriculum commonplaces with the goal of inclusion is important, as is our examination of what, or who, can be discovered in the null curriculum of our classrooms.

The context in which writers write is important in a vision of student writers as developing a craft that can be practiced in supportive environments. Classroom environments, in order to entertain a broad scope for critical literacy, may best support students through attention to all four dimensions of critical literacy including disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

Another message for educators from the portraiture included here is that books and stories make a difference in the lives of readers and listeners. Literature and storytelling have wide potential for informing and inspiring action. All three authors mentioned the relationship between particular stories and their own lives,

indicating that texts—oral as well as written—have transformative potential. Dialogues in this regard can engage students in broader conversations about themselves and others. Teachers who find, and share, an emotional link regarding positive aspects of diversity, offer a legacy worthy of tomorrow’s leaders, although it is a legacy that might not be realized in the immediate, short term. Emotional response, as in my own experience with my mother’s stories, takes time.

Goals such as entrancement with texts arise from the discussions with authors who viewed particular texts as life changing. This has implications for children’s reading and writing. Classroom curriculum that opens spaces for the lives of students within classroom resources and emphasizes personal reasons for writing may be very supportive to the development of the reading and writing process in students. Imbued with relationships between the ‘word and the world’ (Freire, 1991; Freire & Macedo, 1987), particular texts offer support for the kind of ‘pedagogy of love’ Freire (1983, 1991, 1998) discusses when he talks about critical pedagogy, connecting in multiple ways to critical literacy.

The influences discussed by Rachna Gilmore and Pamela Porter as well as within the self-portrait thus offer four four strong implications for the field of Education. The first implication involves the importance of using books and stories about characters with disabilities to support dimensions of critical literacy in classroom approaches, implying that an understanding of the influences that have informed an author’s work may offer a new dimension with respect to a conceptualization of that work. In addition to supporting critical literacy, a second

implication emerging from the author portraits is that books about characters with disabilities offer the opportunity to actualize aspects of inclusion with respect to classroom resources, providing recognition to members of society that have been marginalized in schools and communities.

A third implication of the author portraits emphasizes the importance of experiences that assisted three authors in attending to diversity. Social activism is shaped by circumstance, a conclusion that emphasizes the transformational aspects of education. A fourth implication of the author portraits relates to how particular books and stories emerged within the author's lives as life changing. As educators seek to foster respectful attitudes towards diversity and make school a major force for social change and social justice, it is critical to include stories—both from lived experiences and from books-- to help support discussions with children about the construction of identity. All four of these implications suggest that exposure to critical literacy and particular classroom resources offer opportunities for long-term educational goals rather than imminently measurable aspects of classroom practice .

Other Implications for Practice

In addition to implications for critical literacy, a number of other potential applications to the field of Education can be drawn as a result of this study. These applications refer to conceptualizations of the writing process, the value of entranced and purposeful reading, and particular connections between reading and writing.

In terms of the writing processes of the authors involved in the portraiture, flexible use of outlines emerged as a characteristic trait. Instead of creating outlines as a matter of course prior to the development of a first draft, outlines were often not prepared at all, or completed during or after initial writing. Rachna Gilmore indicated that longer pieces of writing required more attention to outlines, so that things stayed on track. Notes and ideas, however, were recorded consistently by all three authors. The conducting of research also occurred on a flexible basis, not necessarily occurring at any particular stage of the writing process.

Characters seemed to drive much of the writing produced by these three authors. This contradicts common school exercises where students are required to write a story involving a particular plot: the tale of a child who got lost; a rendition of a mystery; a retelling of a folktale. Rather than consistently starting with the story, educators might consider opportunities to support students in developing a particular character, and then assist students in following that character into a story related to the character's particular design. It is the character, reports Pamela Porter, who whispers encouragement, demands completion, not the story itself. In a similar vein, Rachna Gilmore alludes to the experience of walking in a character's shoes, learning their heart and soul. Quite possibly, it is a close identification with a particular character that underpins the kind of entrancement all three writers talk about when discussing their stance during writing.

Entrancement also appeared as an important theme when the authors discussed their childhood reading experiences. All three listed contexts in which particular books, and aspects of personal experiences related to these books, were transformative, and one common element of these situations seemed to be the entranced reading that occurred. Traditional classrooms are not designed to support entranced reading; with continual distractions, in addition to texts not necessarily chosen for individual consumption, classrooms are more suited to brief decoding activities rather than thinking and imaginative practices. Further considerations of ways to offer students contexts for entranced reading as well as entranced writing are thus suggested as important implications of this study. The transformative aspects of reading as these three writers read to their children also highlights the importance of purposeful reading.

That all three authors developed a passion for writing children's books, following experiences reading juvenile literature to their own children, is not extraordinary in the world of children's publishing. In addition, the value of modeling has been acknowledged in the field of Education where we have long been aware of the need to share language rich texts with children. Yet specific attention to modelling has often been reserved for adult writers. Publishers, for example, often encourage a sampling of their preferred styles, in terms of published work, prior to a new author's submission. Writing workshops for adults often expose developing writers to particular published pieces.

As far as children's exposure to quality texts, in addition to supports for oral language development, resources with variety in genre and style have been

highlighted in classroom curricula towards student writing objectives. Yet classroom connections to published literature are often not made explicit in terms of models for children's writing. Teachers read to children, but opportunities for drawing particular aspects of an author's writing into children's own repertoires are often lost. I conjecture that it is this metacognitive attention to forms and formats that will be assistive to students, who, unlike the three authors spotlighted here, may not independently draw learnings from the reading process into the writing process.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of directions for further research have been suggested by this dissertation. My study sample included Canadian novels about characters with disabilities, and it would be interesting to explore portrayals of disability through images alongside the narrative of picture-book texts. A consideration of the inclusion of disability alongside other presentations of 'difference' within other types of media would be intriguing, as well; for example, if one were to peruse the National Council of Teachers of English, how many images of physical disability would be included among teachers and students portrayed? Finally, any summary of the inclusion of characters with disabilities is a moving target—eventually shifting from new and provocative to commonplace as “other meanings of radical take over” (Dresang, 1999, p. xviii).

Educators with agency, reacting to past traditions regarding stereotypical characterizations in children's fiction, are encouraged to include, in classrooms, resources portraying all people. One implication of my study is that further

research is necessary regarding aspects of disability that relate to classroom resources. Because books about characters with disabilities have not been easily available in schools, nor perceived in a performative sense related to the stereotypes of classic fiction, educators have work to do towards establishing curriculum guidelines that include books about characters with disabilities within a social justice perspective that offers direction for exploring these books with students. A related research idea involves the evaluation of the literary qualities of books about characters with disabilities, going beyond my choices regarding content analysis.

Further investigation into the processes of adult authors can offer rich perspectives on the work they produce, as well as on aspects of their processes that may support children's writing development. That outlines are not consistently used by the three authors in the portraits here contradicts a standard teaching practice where students are asked to provide outlines prior to written work. In addition, all three writers talk about spending a great deal of time with a character prior to working out their plot lines, suggesting that drafts of stories may look very different over time. This contradicts teaching practices where children are asked to produce set numbers of new work per term, disallowing long-term engagement with a particular character or project, and where drafts differ only in light of surface changes to punctuation and grammar.

Research that follows critical literacy approaches regarding characters with disabilities, exploring the perspectives of preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and students, is highly recommended. There is a lack of studies

regarding how future teachers read and react to children's literature (McDaniel, 2006, p. 43) as well as a trend towards teachers having to justify individual curriculum making alongside the availability of 'safe' pre-packaged materials (Santomé, 2009, p. 64). In addition, due perhaps to measurement constraints on qualitative research, few studies have followed critical literacy approaches into classrooms. One concern is that children may temporarily respond to teachers' expectations rather than shift in terms of personal agency (Christian-Smith, 1997, p. 56).

Further connections are also waiting to be explored in regards to how digital age principles including interactivity, connectivity, and access (Dresang, 1999; Dresang & Kotrla, 2009) support radical changes in children's literature. As research continues to explore how literature reflects life, Bakhtin's chronotope might continue to be helpful in elucidating time-space reality in children's texts as well as reader responses to these texts.

Further research is also necessary to inquire into the reasons why authors limit the inclusion of 'differences' with respect to characterization, as well as why few books including characters with disabilities appear for ages 8 – 11—possibly a question for publishers. While my work has presented a broad exploration of the landscape on which contemporary books appear that present characters with disabilities, as well as influences on the authors who have created these books, connections between this literary landscape and the surrounding context of Canadian society are limited.

Final Thoughts

This study has illuminated ways by which critical literacy may be encouraged in classrooms through the curricular inclusion of fiction about characters with disabilities. The four dimensions framework (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) that has been employed in this chapter targets disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice, as aspects of critical literacy that are desirable in classroom conversations. Patterns and trends from the study sample of 50 contemporary Canadian children's novels, as well as particular 'chonotopic types' appearing in these novels, have offered perspectives on the first three dimensions of critical literacy mentioned above. Aspects of influences on the writing of three authors, established within the framework of portraiture, have contributed to an understanding of how the fourth dimension of critical literacy is actualized through attention to authors of classroom texts.

The implementation of a critical literacy approach in classrooms is not without its difficulties. Preservice teachers need opportunities to identify and explore the teaching of critical literacy, as research has identified weaknesses in the ability of study participants at this level who "overwhelmingly ignored stereotypes in picture books and young adult novels" (McDaniel, 2006, p. 144). Even when stereotypes were acknowledged, preservice teachers were reluctant to demonstrate agency in situations they perceived as controversial (Williams, 2002; Bainbridge & Brenna, 2010). Practicing as well as preservice teachers need to face their fears and question their assumptions about which books and topics are

appropriate for classroom study (Heffernan, 2004) as “...the curriculum decisions we make in selecting particular resources and in framing them in particular ways reflect our own perceptions and biases” (Woolridge, 2001, p. 264). Teachers must first recognize themselves “as curriculum decision makers” (Woolridge, p. 267) when considering the introduction of critical literacy in their classrooms.

Resources for curriculum are particularly important if students are to be offered the range of critical literacy experiences suggested by the four dimensions (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) discussed previously, as are considerations of classroom milieu, student diversity, and teacher perspective. The integration of fiction books about characters with disabilities into literacy teaching and learning strongly supports critical literacy as a philosophical framework, providing opportunities for new and experienced teachers to develop inroads into the kind of classroom dialogue and activity that enhances social perceptivity.

This dissertation offers, I hope, an inspiring and productive discussion for educators working on agendas of social justice by means of the literacy curriculum as well as scholars in special education, Disability Studies, and English literature. As Freire (2005) reminds us, we are not only in the world but with the world, and it is our privilege and duty to consider wider perspectives than a single, limited viewpoint regardless of whether such a perspective reflects a dominant class or social group. Such a ‘pedagogy of love’ (Freire, 1983; 1991; 1998) offers the power to transform individuals and societies, making this world a more receptive place for all.

Through the inclusion of books mentioned in the body of the dissertation as well as in the annotated bibliography, I anticipate that my work will assist teachers in using literature as “a performance of possibilities” (Madison, 2003, p. 472). The new perspectives that readers derive through critical literacy may be “based on changes in how we view the world; other times, they are expressions of voices we have simply not had an opportunity to hear before” (Yokota & Cai, 2003, p. 472). Rather than offering finite learning, I envision the connection between particular selections of literature and critical literacy as an ongoing endeavour, believing, as do Willis et al (2008), that developing a critical consciousness is linked to “lifelong processes and responses to injustice...drawing attention to the struggle for emancipation, liberation, and democracy” (p. 2).

“Is different wrong?” a young glider shakily asks his sister, aware of his physical difference from the clan that is raising him (Oppel, 2007, p. 83). In the context of the story, the response reflects wider and contemporary stereotypes about difference, and the answer, for Dusk, and for us all, is heartbreaking. I dream of a time when the answer to this question, in real terms, is not derogatory. When the answer is reflective of a diversity that is more ordinary than society at present cares to acknowledge. I dream of a time when children will take their place in school responsive to a respectful curriculum that reflects their individual as well as their universal qualities, and I dream of a time when the question is asked, “Is different wrong?” and the answer will be an unequivocal “No.”

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APPENDIX A

Sample Introductory Letter, Information Letter, Author Consent Form

Department of Elementary Education
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
551 Education Building South
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2G5
June 10, 2009

Dear Author:

I am a PhD student at the University of Alberta who is interested in conducting case study research that explores how authors of Canadian children's books undertake the development of characters who have disabilities. Would you be willing to engage with my research study (using mutually agreed upon methods such as letters, telephone conversations, face-to-face conversations, or email communication)? Your responses to my interview questions regarding character development would be utilized as part of my studies and could appear in academic papers, future publications (as journal articles, for example, or chapters in academic texts), and will be included in my doctoral dissertation. I would not, however, use your comments in this way without your written consent.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana, and Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751. In addition to myself, the only person who will have access to the raw data collected for this study is my supervisor, Dr. Joyce Bainbridge. Benefits of the study may include a chance to reflect on your work within the context of questions regarding character development in fiction.

You are one of the authors who has inspired my own writing, and more about my published books can be found on the following website: www.beverleybrenna.com.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. I look forward to hearing from you. If you agree to engage with this study, I will send you a copy of a more detailed information letter as well as the participant consent form.

Yours truly,

Beverley Brenna

bbrenna@ualberta.ca

Department of Elementary Education
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
551 Education Building South
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2G5
June 10, 2009

Dear Author:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study entitled, "The Construction of Characters with Disabilities in Contemporary Novels for Children." The study aims to:

- Identify Canadian children's books which portray characters with special needs
- Gain insight into the perspectives, understandings and responses of authors of these materials regarding the creation of these characters
- Develop classroom approaches framed in critical literacy for the use of diverse children's literature in classrooms

Knowing that you have written a number of books for young readers that portray characters with disabilities, I am very interested in the perspectives you have on this subject. In particular, I wonder about your decisions to include characters with special needs, and further insights you may have regarding the development of these characters.

The research, designed as a case study, will involve emails, phone, or face-to-face conversations based on research questions I have devised, and may range from one half-hour "conversation" or more, with mutual agreement. If you agree to participate in this study, your name may be used, along with your comments, in my dissertation / research reports / scholarly publications or in presentations at scholarly conferences. It will not be possible to offer anonymity as references to your work will be recognized by readers of the study.

You may withdraw from the study up until the point at which transcripts have been reviewed, by contacting me by phone or e-mail, and, at that time, data will be deleted. Any raw data (cassette tapes, transcriptions of conversations) derived from this study will be kept in a safe place for a minimum of five years following completion of the research project and, when appropriate, destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. You are welcome to request a copy of the results of this research when it is completed and I would be happy to oblige. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana, and Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751.

Your contribution will be valuable to me and to any teachers/researchers interested in children's literature and issues related to critical literacy. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the enclosed Author Consent Form and return it to me in the attached self-addressed envelope, and keep the second copy of the Author Consent Form for your records.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Beverly Brenna

For further information, please contact:

Beverly Brenna
supervisor)
Department of Elementary Education
551 Education South
University of Alberta
T6G 2G5
Office: 780 492 2215
bbrenna@ualberta.ca

or Dr. Joyce Bainbridge (researcher's PhD

Department of Elementary Education
551 Education South
University of Alberta
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Office: 780 492 3751
joyce.bainbridge@ualberta.ca

.....

Participant Consent Form

(two copies enclosed; please retain one copy for your records and return the other in the self-addressed stamped envelope)

I, _____, hereby consent to be involved in the case study research project, “The Construction of Characters with Disabilities in Contemporary Novels for Children” being conducted by Beverley Brenna.

I agree to be involved in this research project by:

- responding to interview questions by email, phone, or, if convenient, in person

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study until the point at which transcripts have been reviewed, without repercussions, and the data collected up to that point will be destroyed
- the results of this research may be used in the researcher’s PhD dissertation/research reports/scholarly publications or in presentations at scholarly conferences
- any quotations from personal communication with me will be cited under “personal communication” in the references of any written materials; I will have the opportunity to review interview transcripts and augment for clarification, if necessary
- because my work is widely published, it will not be possible to remain anonymous; my contribution to the research will be credited to me by name
- I may request a copy of the results of this research and the researcher will be happy to oblige
- data will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of 5 years following the completion of the research project and, when appropriate, destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality
- the plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana, and Saint-Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751

(signature of author)

(date)

For further information, please contact:

Beverley Brenna
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551 Education South
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or Dr. Joyce Bainbridge (researcher’s doctoral supervisor)
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joyce.bainbridge@ualberta.ca

APPENDIX B

Sample Transcript of Conversations with Authors

Saturday, Dec. 6, 2008 (Phone conversation ongoing between Bev and Rachna)

B ...Now, Uncle Chad, when I read him, I was very intrigued, and I seemed to be trying to put him on an Asperger's Spectrum, in some way.

R Oh, did you! Same as Taylor, really?

B Yeah.

R Really, I never thought of that. Wow! That's brilliant! That never occurred to me...I thought of him as being distant, and kind of arrogant...a type A personality, and wanting to win is the key. He's really into success. And he's really very insecure. I knew that, because I kind of had to figure out why in the world someone like Aunt Alice would want to go out with this guy... I had to see that I understood his vulnerability and that Alice understood his vulnerability, which is why she loved him, and I had to show that he could be tender and romantic. And he could be contrite, and he was, but seen through Nobby's eyes at the beginning he's just this awful know-it-all, and obnoxious.

B Well, it was intriguing for me. And you know why—I'm looking at everything I read, trying to find characters who might have special needs of some kind. So I'm lookin' for 'em!

R Fascinating! (Laughing) Have you found them in any of my other books?

B No! (Laughing) None that I know of!

R Well, that's fascinating! Taylor has Asperger's, right?

B Right.

R But she's much more so than Uncle Chad might?

B Right. Interestingly, I had written a draft of that novel, as well as *The Moon Children* novel of mine, without having these characters have identified special needs, like you talk about. And it was in my rewriting that these particular parts of their personalities came out, and I then did more research...

R Yeah? Hmm. Same way (as me)!

B Same way!

R Huh. Wow. Because I thought, Bev...when I saw the outline of your questions I thought, you're going to be disappointed when I said, "This is crazy but I just wrote these characters before I did the research..."

APPENDIX C

Content Analysis Chart of the 50 Canadian Contemporary Juvenile Novels Which Comprised the
Study Sample

Title/ Author/ Pub date	Character/ Age/ Sex/ Main or Secondary/ Setting (place/year)	Disability/ Other difference s (culture/ gender)	Cure?	Death?	Relation- ship of disability to plot	Self- image/ Family (parents)	Age range of readers	Genre	Per- spective of charact- erization/ Tense/ Chron- ology/ Time span

APPENDIX D

The 50 Novels That Comprise the Study Sample

- Aker, D. (2007). *The space between*. Toronto: HarperCollins.
- Bell, W. (2006). *The blue helmet*. Random House of Canada.
- Brenna, B. (2005). *Wild orchid*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press.
- Brenna, B. (2007). *The moon children*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press.
- Carter, A. L. (2001). *In the clear*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.
- Choyce, L. (2004). *Smoke and mirrors*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- Dyer, K. C. (2007). *Ms. Zephyr's notebook*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- Dyer, K. C. (2002). *Seeds of time*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- Dyer, K. C. (2003). *Secret of light*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- Dyer, K. C. (2005). *Shades of red*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- Ellis, D. (1999). *Looking for X*. Toronto: Groundwood Books
- Fairfield, L. (2009). *Tyranny*. Toronto: Tundra Books.
- Fournier, K. M. (2007). *Sandbag shuffle*. Saskatoon, SK: Thistledown Press.
- Frizzell, C. (2006). *Chill*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.
- Gilmore, R. (1995). *A friend like Zilla*. Toronto: Second Story Press.
- Gingras, C. (2009). *Pieces of me* (S. Ouriou, Trans.). Kids Can Press.
- Goobie, B. (2002). *Kicked out*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.
- Haworth-Attard, B. (2002). *Irish chain*. Toronto: HarperCollins.
- Holeman, L. (2002). *Search of the moon king's daughter*. Toronto: Tundra Books.
- Horrocks, A. (2006). *Almost Eden*. Toronto: Tundra Books.
- Huser, G. (2003). *Stitches*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.
- Janz, H. L. (2004). *Sparrows on wheels*. Edmonton, AB: Doc Crip Press.
- Johnston, J. (2006). *A very fine line*. Toronto: Tundra Books.
- Lawrence, I. (2006). *Gemini summer*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- Leavitt, M. (2004). *Heck, Superhero*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press.
- Lekich, J. (2002). *The losers' club*. Toronto: Annick Press.

- Little, J. (2005). *Forward, Shakespeare!* Victoria, BC: Orca Books.
- Little, J. (2000). *Willow and Twig*. Toronto: Penguin Canada.
- MacDonald, A. L. (2009). *Seeing red*. Toronto: Kids Can Press.
- McBay, B., & Heneghan, J. (2003). *Waiting for Sarah*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.
- McKay, S. (2000). *Charlie Wilcox*. Toronto: Penguin Books.
- McLintock, N. (2008). *Dead Silence*. Toronto: Scholastic.
- McNicoll, S. (2003). *A different kind of beauty*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
- McNicoll, S. (2006). *Beauty returns*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
- Minaki, C. (2007). *Zoe's extraordinary holiday adventures*. Toronto: Second Story Press.
- Nugent, C. (2004). *Francesca and the Magic Bike*. Vancouver, BC: Raincoast Books.
- Oppel, K. (2007). *Darkwing*. Toronto: HarperCollins.
- Porter, P. (2005). *The crazy man*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.
- Roorda, J. (2007). *Wings of a bee*. Toronto: Sumach Press.
- Shaw, L. (2009). *Thinandbeautiful.com*. Toronto: Second Story Press.
- Skrypuch, M. (1999). *The hunger*. Toronto: Boardwalk Books.
- Stevenson, R. (2008). *Big guy*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.
- Tokio, M. (2003). *More than you can chew*. Toronto: Tundra Books.
- Trembath, D. (1996). *The Tuesday café*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.
- Tullson, D. (2006). *Zero*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
- Waldorf, H. (2008). *Tripping*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press.
- Walters, E. (2000). *Rebound*. Toronto: Stoddart Kids.
- Walters, E. (2003). *Run*. Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Walters, E. (2005). *Elixir*. Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Walters, E. (2009). *Special Edward*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

APPENDIX E

Annotated Bibliography of Contemporary Canadian Children's Books That Depict Characters With Disabilities

Junior Fiction: ages 8 and up Intermediate Fiction: ages 11 and up Young Adult Fiction: ages 14 and up
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Aker, D. (2007) *The space between*. Toronto: HarperCollins.

In Mexico celebrating his 18th birthday, events unfold for Jace—a grade 12 kid from Halifax— that are completely unexpected. Instead of losing his virginity, as was his plan, he develops a perplexing friendship with a guy whom he later discovers is gay, and then watches the girl of his dreams head back home to her boyfriend. With new insight regarding what it means to be ‘different,’ Jace is better equipped to understand his elder brother’s suicide and allow himself to grieve over Stefan’s death. At the same time, Jace values even more deeply his relationship with his little brother, Luke, a 9 year old boy with autism.

Excerpt:

Sometimes it's like a light shutting off, and that's what happens this time. One minute Lucas is totally fixated on the screen and the next he's

on the balcony looking at me with this What-are-you-waiting-for? expression on his face. Like I'm the one who's been holding him up all this time. He points toward the water.

"Beach," he says.

"You bet, buddy," I say, ruffling his hair. After the last few minutes I'd like to put my arms around him and pull him close, but I don't. Lucas doesn't much like being hugged, sometimes not even by our mother. No one in the Antonakos family has ever been big on physical displays of affection, anyway.

I stand up and my notebook falls to my feet. I take a step forward to pick it up but my toe kicks it, sending it flying through the narrow space between the Plexiglas and the balcony floor. I watch in disbelief as it sails through the air and arcs downward, its flight ending abruptly in the branches of a silver thatch palm.

"Unbelievable!" I mutter. "Shit!"

"Shit!" Lucas parrots back to me, and I whirl to face him. Of all the times for him to actually be listening.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include loss, self-acceptance and self-discovery.

Read-ons: Craig Thompson's (2003) autobiographical graphic novel *Blankets* contains a similar journey of awakening and discovery for two characters: Craig, the narrator, and Raina, a girlfriend who has two siblings with intellectual disabilities. Francis Chalifour's (2005) *After* and Brenda Bellingham's

(1998) *Drowning in Secrets* are other titles involving the aftermath of suicide in a teen's family. Julie Burtinshaw's (2008) *The Perfect Cut* is an even more mature read about surviving the death of a sibling. Julie Roorda's (2007) *Wings of a Bee* and Marthe Jocelyn's (2008) *Would You* also deal with sibling rivalry and loss of a sibling. Katherine Paterson's (1980) *Jacob Have I Loved* is another title that explores sibling rivalry.

Bell, W. (2006). *The blue helmet*. Random House of Canada.

Lee is a high school drop-out living with his aunt in New Toronto; a part-time job as a courier introduces him to some interesting people, and one of these—Bruce Cutter, a man with a mental illness—changes his life forever. Their unlikely friendship offers Lee a different perspective on violence, and Lee faces his own aggressive habits with transformative results. Cutter's characterization includes the richness of a man who exists in light and dark phases, whose uniqueness accompanies but doesn't overshadow his humanness, and whose backstory as a soldier evolves as a framework for the mental health issues that have developed. Cutter's eventual suicide leads Lee further into an attempt to understand the man who has brought Lee peace and establishes that Cutter has at last been the peacekeeper he envisioned himself to be.

Excerpt:

There was something about the house, besides the stale air and musty odour, that made me feel kind of trapped. Then I realized what it was.

There was no natural light.

“Here, I’ll take that,” Cutter said, and I handed him the bag. He carried it through to the kitchen, tore it open, rummaged around for a moment, and came back with it.

“Tell Andrea I put the empties inside,” he said.

There were four pill containers in the bag, along with lids. “I don’t get it,” I said.

“She’s always after me to remember my meds,” he said, his eye half-winking rapidly. “If I don’t, I slide into Never Never Land again. I start colouring outside the lines. Mixed metaphor. So I return the empties to prove I’ve been a good boy.”

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include anger-management, developing friendships, and father/son relationships.

Read-ons: S. E. Hinton’s (1967) *The Outsiders* makes a good connection in terms of teen choices regarding anger and violence. Michèle Marineau’s (1995) *The Road to Chlifa* (translated by Susan Ouriou) offers a portrayal of another teen whose past threatens his future. Paul Zindel’s (1980) *The Pigman’s Legacy* offers an additional look at how one human being can affect others. Beth Goobie’s (2005) *Something Girl* presents another side of anger through the perspective of an abuse victim.

Brenna, B. (2005). *Wild Orchid*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press.

Taylor Jane Simon is an eighteen-year-old with Asperger’s Syndrome who is reluctantly spending the summer with her mother in Prince Albert National Park. Due to Taylor’s ingenuity and perseverance, the summer

has its ups as well as its downs. Taylor gets her first job. She sees her first live theatre—*The Birthday Party*--a unique look at social interaction by Nobel prize winning playwright Harold Pinter. And she makes headway in reaching a personal goal—acquiring a boyfriend. Readers explore universal themes related to coming-of-age in this first-person account recorded in Taylor’s journal.

Excerpt:

The most interesting thing I discovered about orchids is that to thrive, they require a balance of heredity and environment. The seed must fall on a special kind of fungus that allows it to germinate. Orchids have a reputation for being difficult to grow—they are unusually discerning plants that need a home devoted to their unique needs.

Funny, though, that what I remember most about today is not the orchids. It’s the man who was replanting the bog specimens. He was wearing khaki pants and a shirt with a crest over one pocket, and a brown Tilley hat. He had longish brown hair that crept out from under the hat, and a short brown beard. He had a soft voice that was not high or low, just somewhere in the middle, and brown boots. His hands were tanned, but you could see where the shirt pulled back that his arms were lighter. He reminds me of Indiana Jones, although I really didn’t get a good look at his face.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include coming-of-age, teen independence, friendship, and mother/daughter relationships.

Read-ons: *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger (1945) is a book Taylor mentions in the story; mature readers are encouraged to explore parallel coming-of-age themes with this title as well as Mark Haddon's (2002) adult crossover novel: *the curious incident of the dog in the night time*, and Terry Spencer Hesser's (1998) *Kissing Doorknobs*. Madeleine L'Engle's (2008) *The Joys of Love* involves an idealistic girl's apprenticeship in summer theatre. Steve Kluger's (2008) *My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, & Fenway Park* is a story with mature themes that contains diary entries, emails, and text messages following the lives of three high-school students, with a focus on elements of exceptionality including disability and a same-sex crush. Alyxandra Harvey-Fitzhenry's (2008) *Broken* and Beth Goobie's (2002) *Kicked Out* contain perspectives on first boyfriends that compare to Taylor's relationship with Kody.

Brenna, B. (2007). *The Moon Children*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press.

The Moon Children is a realistic fiction novel for ages 9 – 12 about a friendship between Billy, a boy with a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and Natasha, an adopted girl from Romania. The story takes place in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, where Billy is planning to enter a community talent show with his amazing yoyo routine. He and his dad have practiced the tricks, but his father, an alcoholic, disappears and may not return for contest—and Billy's not convinced he can perform without his dad.

Excerpt:

“Hey, do you know about the talent contest?” Billy asked. “It’s next Thursday. I’m going to win, and my dad is going to come.”

Billy hoped this last statement was true and, to make sure it was, he said it again.

“My dad is going to come, you know.”

The girl tilted her small face towards the sky. Billy remembered how she had stared at the moon that morning. He looked up, following her gaze, but all he saw was blue sky.

“There’s no moon there,” he said. “Why are you always looking for the moon?”

The girl turned and went inside before he could think of anything else to say. The big front windows, with their closed curtains, loomed over him and, above them, two other windows stared down at him like dark eyes.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; themes include self-actualization and friendship.

Read-ons: Ann Cameron’s (1985) picture book retelling of the north coast explanatory myth *How Raven Freed the Moon* is worth reading alongside *The Moon Children* as it contains the story that helps Billy understand Natasha’s need to share the weight of the heavy secret she has been carrying. *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* by Jack Gantos (1998) involves a boy who is also dealing with self-control issues. Powerlessness is a theme common to the *Joey Pigza* books as well as to others, including *The Pinballs* by Betsy Byars (1977), Trilby Kent’s

(2009) *Medina Hill*, and *The 18th Emergency* by Betsy Byars (1973). Kate di Camillo's (2002) *The Tiger Rising* and Pamela Porter's (2005) *The Crazy Man* portray friendships between people who also carry burdens and secrets.

Carter, A. L. (2001). *In the clear*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

Pauline is a 12 year old Ontario girl recovering from polio. The story is set in the late 1950s and begins when Pauline is at home from the hospital, using a leg brace, and refusing to consider old friends or a return to her past life. She even gives up on reading, and then, through secret encounters with *Heidi* and *The Secret Garden*, despairs that she will never realize that kind of happy ending. Slowly she overcomes the idea that happy endings must always involve the overcoming of a disability, and begins to fashion for herself a different kind of happy ending.

Excerpt:

Once upon a time, I could walk and run. For me, there's a huge mountain in my childhood. Everything that happened - all that was before the mountain - is once upon a time. Does everyone have a mountain in their lives, a before and after? The mountain fills my sky and I will never cross its peak, never go back to that other time, before I got polio. But I remember everything.

Description: Intermediate historical fiction that evokes time and place but also hinges on the universal; themes include friendship, self-actualization, and dealing with changes.

Read-ons: Spyri's (1880) *Heidi* and Burnett's (1988) *The Secret Garden* are recommended companion titles. Julie Johnston's (1992) Governor General's Award winning *Hero of Lesser Causes* also deals with juvenile polio, as does the New Zealand published *Run* by Linda Aksomitis (2007). Other contemporary fiction with related themes includes Kit Pearson's (2007) *Awake and Dreaming*, whose protagonist uses reading as a source of support. *Home Free* by Sharon Jennings (2009)—another story about friendship and courage—also has references to classic literature. *The Mealworm Diaries* by Anna Kerz (2009) involves a young protagonist coming to terms with a different kind of loss. Maxine Trottier's (2009) historical fiction *Blood Upon Our Land: The North West Resistance Diary of Josephine Bouvier* presents a young Métis girl's search for personal identity.

Choyce, L. (2004). *Smoke and mirrors*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

Sixteen-year-old Simon has always been considered odd; born with prenatal effects from his mother's use of prescription medication, he has always had attention difficulties, and since a skateboarding accident that caused a serious brain injury, he has had short-term memory loss. When a mysterious girl that no one else can see becomes his life skills coach, readers at first assume that she is simply an effect of his brain differences; the discovery that she is actually a real girl in a coma, somehow having out-of-body experiences, lends fantasy to otherwise realistic elements of the story. Simon's eventual realization of his power as a healer attests to a balance of gifts and challenges overlooked by his parents who have

concentrated on his difficulties to the exclusion of his dreams and interests.

Excerpt:

Both my dad and my mom, in my estimation, had told me some ridiculous things over the years, given me bad advice, shown me how little they truly understood important things like skateboarding and astral projection and science fiction. They wasted the days of their lives chasing money.

I always hoped to show them that there was another way to live. I wanted to show them they were wrong about so many things. I always knew that I was not normal, that I had problems, but I also knew that I was capable of seeing a kind of wonder in the world.

Description: Young adult fantasy; themes include self-acceptance and self-discovery as well as developing friendships and parent-teen relationships. Possible metafictional elements appear in the occasional shift from first-person into third-person narrative.

Read-ons: In the course of this novel, Simon makes references to Shakespeare's (1623) *Macbeth* as well as to writers James Joyce and William James. Beth Goobie's (2002) *Kicked Out* is an Orca Sounding's teen read dealing with another difficult parent-teen relationship, as does Don Trembath's (1996) *The Tuesday Café*. Meg Rosoff's (2007) *What I Was* also explores how a mysterious companion named Finn changes the protagonist, who wants to have an effect on Finn in return. The subject of imaginary friends is also included in Deborah Ellis's (1999) *Looking for X*. The paranormal is explored further in titles

by Margaret Buffie, including her 1992 novel *Someone Else's Ghost*, as well as Bruce McBay and James Heneghan's (2003) *Waiting for Sarah*, and Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman's "Cathy Series" beginning with their 2006 title *Cathy's Book*. Another character caught in the spirit world is Adrien in Beth Goobie's (2000) mature read *Before Wings*.

Dyer, K. C. (2002). *Seeds of time*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

Thirteen-year-old Darrell Connor is spending the summer at an ocean-side British Columbia boarding school where she discovers a passage through time, through which she hopes to change her own circumstances—a motorcycle accident that, three years ago, took her father's life and severely damaged her leg, requiring the use of a prosthesis. Darrell's adventures in 14th century Scotland are unique in that she arrives with the same physical disability, just a different type of artificial leg as dictated by the times.

Excerpt:

She looked down and saw that she was no longer wearing jeans. Instead, she was wearing a long skirt of thick brown wool. At the hem of the skirt, her left foot protruded, encased in a worn brown leather boot, soled in wood and caked with a combination of mud and sand. Where her right foot should be was a splintered stub of wood, like the end of a crutch.

Darrell let out a choking sob. Her head began to swim. She put her face in her hands and closed her eyes tightly, then as quickly opened them again. Everything looked the same. She reached down and pulled the hem

of the dress up slowly to see the stump of her right leg tightly bound to a wooden splint, ending in a peg leg like a pirate would wear. No plastic foot. No prosthesis at all, really. Just a wooden peg, bound tightly to the base of her leg.

Description: Intermediate fantasy; themes include self-acceptance and bullying as well as emphasizing the lessons to be learned from history.

Read-ons: This title and its two sequels connect well to other time slip novels including Lynne Kositsky's (2000) *A Question of Will*, Judith Silverthorne's (2005) *The Secret of the Stone House*, Lois Donovan's (2007) *Winds of L'Acadie*, Marsha Skrypuch's (1999) *The Hunger*, and Lynne Fairbridge's (1999) *Tangled in Time*, as well as Nicholas Maes' (2009) combination of futuristic science fiction and time travel in *Laughing Wolf*. Darren Krill's (2006) *The Uncle Duncle Chronicles: Escape from Treasure Island* involves characters that move into a fictional past. One other connecting fantasy is Barbara Nickel's (2006) *Hannah Waters and the Daughter of Johann Sebastian Bach*.

Dyer, K. C. (2003). *Secret of light*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

In this sequel to *Seeds of Time*, Darrell Connor's story continues as, along with new friends Brodie and Kate, she begins her first full year at the alternative art school Eagle Glen. The friends travel, along with stray dog Delaney, through the abandoned lighthouse, to 15th century Italy, where they encounter a young Leonardo Da Vinci. When school bully Conrad Kennedy accidentally accompanies them, things don't go

according to plan and he is left behind in the past. In these travels, Darrell's prosthetic limb is rendered as an elaborately carved, roll-toed paw, similar to a piano leg, but she bears the discomfort so that she can search further for a way to change her own past—to somehow alter the motorcycle accident that caused her injury and killed her father.

Excerpt:

The long weekend had flown by. Her mother had taken a day off to celebrate Thanksgiving by cooking an enormous turkey. But Darrell had spent the whole weekend formulating her plans, which gnawed at her like a tickertape running along the base of her brain.

What would her mother think if she found a way to change the past? Darrell stared out the window, imagining the look on her mother's face when she walked in the front door on two sound legs. Or even better, if she got carried in on the back of her wonderful, beautiful, perfect father, as if the accident had never happened. Okay—so her mom hadn't believed her father was wonderful or perfect. They were divorced, after all. But maybe Darrell could find a way to fix that, too.

Description: Intermediate fantasy; themes include self-acceptance and bullying as well as emphasizing the importance of history.

Read-ons: As above, for *Seeds of Time*.

Dyer, K. C. (2005). *Shades of red*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

In this conclusion of the Eagle Glen trilogy, Darrell and her friends travel through a portal in the library, entering the period of the Protestant

Reformation in England. In this context, Darrell's prosthesis transforms into a peg leg that has a hinged wooden foot. Modern issues of racism and discrimination are depicted as ages old through Darrell's experiences in the Court of King Henry VIII where priests secretly offer safe passage to Jews targeted by the Church's brutal cleansing. In this title, Darrell learns what she has always known—that you cannot change the past—and comes to terms with her physical self in the present time.

Excerpt:

Darrell reached out her hand and followed Brodie into the passage. Within two or three feet a worn wooden stairway opened below them. Darrell and Brodie cautiously followed Paris's bobbing flashlight down the steps. The thin glow of light from above disappeared as the stairs reached a landing and changed direction.

Paris was waiting on the landing. "This is as far as I got before," he said in a low voice. Below the landing the surface of the steps changed abruptly from wood to rock and began a tight spiral down into the darkness.

Description: Intermediate fantasy; themes include self-acceptance and coming to terms with loss.

Read-ons: As above, for *Seeds of Time*.

Dyer, K. C. (2007). *Ms. Zephyr's notebook*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

Much of the emotional build in this novel takes place in the children's ward of a fictional Evergreen County Hospital and revolves

around three main characters: 15 year old Logan, whose point of view is dominant in the story, has Crohn's Disease; 14 year old Cleo, whose 'real' name is Jacqueline, has an eating disorder; 11 year old Kip is awaiting a kidney transplant. This complex story about identity and relationships unfolds through documents discovered by Logan in their hospital teacher's journal. Ms. Zephyr's school notebook contains letters from families, updates from school, and assignments from the students themselves. Each of the three children deals differently with illness, and yet what they have in common becomes a tie that binds, even through what Logan fears is Cleo's next suicide attempt.

Excerpt:

If he could somehow manage to find Cleo before everyone else, he wanted to tell her something that he'd finally figured out. Maybe it was just a question of listening to the right voices. Not the kind of voices that told a person to kick a hole in the wall or stuff your fingers down your throat. Other voices—other ideas. Maybe all heroes were not found on rugby pitches or prancing in front of the Hollywood paparazzi.

Then there was the question of the meds. She took these pills every day, right? He racked his memory. The hospital must have put them in the bottle for when Cleo was given the weekend pass. But he couldn't remember how often she took them or even what she needed them for. That she left them behind was the worst sign yet.

Logan rubbed his tired eyes. Who knew what he was going to say or do? He wasn't even sure himself. He just knew this journey might be worth something, if he could just find Cleo. He just needed to know she would be okay.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; themes prompt readers to explore what life is like with debilitating illness, and to recognize how barriers between people are erected and removed.

Read-ons: Paul Zindel's (1968) *The Pigman* offers a good companion read due to its presentation through the alternate voices of John and Lorraine and in terms of its close look at teen relationships. A desperate search for a friend provides a connection between K. C. Dyer's (2007) *Ms Zephyr's Notebook* and Deborah Ellis's (1999) *Looking for X*. Natalie Babbitt's (2000) *Tuck Everlasting* offers a look at life choices through the theme of everlasting life. Other life choices are explored in Susin Nielsen's (2008) *Word Nerd* about a boy with a serious peanut allergy who seeks identity and acceptance, and Iain Lawrence's (2000) *Ghost Boy*.

Ellis, D. (1999). *Looking for X*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.

Eleven-year-old Khyber, living in downtown Toronto, embarks on a desperate search for a friend through first-person narration that illuminates her intelligence and resiliency in a life that looks bleak from the outside but from the inside has a fine balance of edginess, warmth, and adventure. Because of Khyber's strong, matter-of-fact voice, the scenes depicting her relationship with autistic twin brothers and the episodes with

X, a homeless person, operate without sentimentality. One of the main plot lines in the novel is that Khyber's mother has decided to place David and Daniel in a group home, a plan to which Khyber is resistant.

Excerpt:

Daniel was asleep in Tammy's arms, which made him a lot easier to carry than David. David wanted to walk, so he squirmed and fought me all the way home. I wanted to ask Tammy if we could trade boys, but she looked angry at me still, so I didn't ask.

David's boots were still in the hallway, and I kicked them into the apartment ahead of me. I was glad to put him down, and I think he was glad to get away from me, too. I crawled up to my bunk, remembering too late that Tammy had my blanket, and it was covered with blood.

Mom put the twins in their room, then helped me off with my jacket. I was too tired to do it myself. She got me into a dry nightgown, then covered me up with her own bedspread.

"I didn't do it on purpose," I said.

"I know you didn't. But do you see what I mean, about the boys being too much for us?"

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; winner of a Governor General's Award for Children's Fiction (text); themes include family dynamics and dealing with change.

Read-ons: Jean Little's (2007) *Dancing Through the Snow* and Katherine Paterson's (1978) *The Great Gilly Hopkins* have girl protagonists with similar

spunk. Cynthia Lord's (2006) *Rules* is another intermediate novel that explores the relationship of a 12 year old girl with a younger brother who has autism. *No Place for Kids* by Alison Lohans (1999) is the story of two siblings on the run from social services through the sometimes terrifying, sometimes comforting, world of the urban homeless, while Martin Leavitt's (2003) *Tom Finder* deals with another type of escape. Sarah Ellis's (1991) *Pick-Up Sticks*, winner of a Governor General's Award for Children's Fiction (text), focuses on a mother/daughter relationship similar to the one between Khyber and Tammy. The subject of imaginary friends is also dealt with in Lesley Choyce's (2004) *Smoke and Mirrors*.

Fairfield, L. (2009). *Tyranny*. Toronto: Tundra Books.

This graphic novel follows Anna's chronological journey as she succumbs to an eating disorder named as her personal demon, Tyranny, and then accounts her eventual triumph. The author cites a long term personal struggle with eating disorders as her inspiration for writing this book.

Excerpt:

I could no longer concentrate, and fell far behind in classes. I dropped out of high school on Valentine's Day. I felt as if I had been walking a tightrope and had fallen off...and was at the beginning of a long descent.

Description: Young adult graphic novel; themes include self-acceptance and identity, and the information about eating disorders is presented in a straightforward manner.

Read-ons: Another mature, graphic novel from an adolescent girl's perspective is Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki's (2008) *Skim. Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (1999) involves the perspectives of a 16 year old boy who is being tried for felony murder; readers might wish to compare Steve's self-image and external pressures with the societal pressures that have influenced Anna, as well as the strength of character Steve and Anna share. Francis Chalifour's (2005) *Call Me Mimi* and Robin Stevenson's (2008) *Big Guy* are additional titles for teens that explore body image. Other novels that deal with eating disorders include *The Hunger* by Marsha Skrypuch (1999), *thinandbeautiful.com* by Liane Shaw (2009), *Ms Zephyr's Notebook* by K.C. Dyer (2007), and Marnelle Tokio's (2003) *More Than You Can Chew* as well as Diane Tullson's (2006) *Zero*.

Fournier, K. M. (2007). *Sandbag shuffle*. Saskatoon, SK: Thistle-down Press.

Owen and Andrew are two teens escaping a group home during the Manitoba Red River flood of 1997. What makes this book so original as compared to other books of its genre is that Owen, a boy of rapid-fire wit, has no legs and isn't leery of exploiting their absence. The action takes place as the boys travel via the river from Grand Forks to Emerson, Manitoba, then make their way on land to Winnipeg.

Excerpt:

"You're just lucky I pity you, little man," said Andrew.

"What are you saying, there, Leg-boy? You wanna piece of me?"

"Don't test me, Stumpy Joe. I'll smear your ass all up and down this town."

“Ha! You ain’t even man enough to try it.”

Tossing the chip bag aside, Andrew got up from the ground in a great flying leap and tackled Owen in his chair. The chair went over, Owen spilled out, and the two boys punched and grappled at one another up and down the expanse of damp and brownish grass. Andrew, having the advantage of legs, had the better of it for the most part, but Owen got in more than one good hit. The fight ended when Andrew, having pinned his friend to the ground with both knees, pulled up a fistful of grass and began rubbing it in Owen’s face. Then Owen grabbed a fistful of grass for himself and began rubbing it in Andrew’s face. And then both of them laughed so hard they couldn’t keep it up any more, and they lay on the ground in the thin light of early morning, laughing.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction: contextually realistic profanity in addition to transgressive politics raises the reading age; themes include life altering journeys and coming-of-age.

Read-ons: Progressive attitudes toward disability are also presented in William Bell’s (1991) title *Absolutely Invincible!* Sherman Alexie’s (2007) mature read *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* involves a different kind of journey as 14 year old Arnold Spirit Jr. tries to escape the reservation, and Barbara Smucker’s (1977) *Underground to Canada* deals with escape from slavery. Three other quests for escape are found in Wendy A. Lewis’ (2008) *Freefall*, a realistic title dealing with child abuse and set against the backdrop of skydiving, Meg Rosoff’s (2007) *What I Was*—the story of a young man during a

transformative summer, and Mark Twain's (1884) classic text: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Michael Noel's (2004) *Good for Nothing* is another teen novel that deals with the effects of history and culture on coming-of-age.

Frizzell, C. (2006). *Chill*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

Chill is a high school boy with a 'bum leg' whose story is told through the eyes of Sean, a friend and classmate. Chill stereotypically 'overcomes' his disability by using art to confront an abusive teacher who bullies Chill because of his physical differences.

Excerpt:

Chill's foot dragged behind him like a murder victim being taken to a shallow grave by a killer too weak to do the job, but he still stood straighter than any other kid in school.

His presence far exceeded his wiry five-foot-nine, fifteen-year-old body. Chill's size didn't matter because he was fast, and the speed was made twice as powerful because no one expected it from a guy with a bum leg.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction contrived to suit the grade 3.5 reading level of the Orca Soundings imprint; themes include the triumph of good vs evil, and man's inhumanity to man.

Read-ons: David Poulsen's (2008) *Numbers* is another story of a high school student who challenges a teacher, in this case for dispersing hate-literature. William Bell's (2001) *Stones* could also be used to further explore hate-crimes. Other links involve the power of art, such as is represented by the magic realism

of Alyxandra Harvey-Fitzhenry's (2008) *Broken*. A look at artists and their self-concepts appears in Peter H. Reynold's (2004) picture book, *Ish*.

Gilmore, R. (1995). *A friend like Zilla*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

The setting is a summer cottage on Prince Edward Island where Nobby, short for Zenobia—a young girl from Ottawa—is holidaying with relatives. The cottage owner has a 17 year old daughter, Zilla whose developmental disabilities elicit stereotypical reactions from Uncle Chad. As Zilla becomes Nobby's friend, "It was sort of neat how we fit together," Nobby relates. "Like puzzle bits. Zilla could do things I couldn't, like cook and find clams and berries and stuff. But I could read and draw and think up ideas." Through her friendship with Zilla, Nobby learns to understand the complexities of people, including her Uncle Chad, whom, until this point in her life, she has vilified.

Excerpt:

By the end of the day I felt like I'd known Zilla forever. Her having a grown-up body didn't really matter. She dressed like me in shorts, T-shirts and stuff, and she liked to play. She never once talked silly teenage talk. She was just a regular kid. Better, actually, 'cause she knew so many neat things.

But sometimes she didn't get what I said. Like a joke or a big word or something. Yet she knew really fun stuff. Like the best place and time for clam digging. Where the bank swallows lived. Even the safest path down the cliff to the beach. The funny thing was she didn't know how cool it was

that she knew all that. I mean, she didn't often come up with ideas about what to do. But I had lots, and Mrs. Rowan suggested things I didn't know about.

Description: Junior realistic fiction; themes include friendships and considerations of diversity.

Read-ons: *Lily's Crossing* by Patricia Reilly Giff (1997) and Myrna Neuringer Levy's (1991) *The Summer Kid* make good connections through their exploration of developing summer friendships. Betsy Byars' (1970) *Summer of the Swans*, along with *The Summer Kid*, also offer opportunities to compare and contrast notions of ability/disability.

Gingras, C. *Pieces of me* (S. Ouriou, Trans.). Toronto: Kids Can Press.

This title is Susan Ouriou's Governor General's Award winning English translation of the novella *La Liberté? Connais pas* and follows the story of Mira, a Quebec teenager living with a domineering and mentally unstable mother. Catherine, the new girl, is at first drawn to Mira because of the artistic talents they share, but in the end proves not to be the friend Mira thinks she is. With the death of her father, Mira sinks into a depression, recovering with the help of Paule, the school counsellor, who is blind.

Excerpt:

"She sews coats, skirts, dresses, blouses. She knits scarves and sweaters. She puts them all in boxes in closets, in the hallway, in the shed. Then she starts all over again."

“She doesn’t sell them?”

“No.”

“What do you live on then?”

“My father gives her money.”

“Why?”

“My mother can’t work. She...she...It’s like she’s afraid of people.

Worse...she’s afraid of having her designs stolen.”

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; mature themes include sexuality, powerlessness, living with mental illness, and the search for personal identity.

Read-ons: Susan Juby’s (2000) *Alice, I Think*, is told within a similar context; *Egghead* by Carlyne Pignat (2008) is another young adult novel that tackles identity-issues, as well as bullying, through the voices of three first-person narrators, one of whom uses free-verse poetry. An Na’s (2001) *A Step from Heaven* and Rukhsana Khan’s (1999) *Dahling If You Luv Me, Would You Please, Please Smile* also involve high-school settings, following protagonists who navigate displacement, immigration, and cultural identity towards self-acceptance. Shem Salvadorai’s (2005) *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* engages readers with similar themes of self-acceptance as a young boy identifies his homosexuality. A more esoteric link is to Shaun Tan’s (2006) *The Arrival*, through which the experiences of immigrants could be compared to any confused encounters with one’s own world.

Goobie, B. (2002). *Kicked out*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

Dime, a rebellious Winnipeg teen, goes to live with her brother Darren who has been quadriplegic since an accident three years earlier. In a different context, away from her domineering parents, Dime begins to sort out aspects of her life that need exploration including the dreamy new boyfriend, Gabe, whose looks and motorbike initially trump his abusive nature.

Excerpt:

At 9 p.m., Darren and I headed out to his favourite bar. Some of his friends were there and we joined them at a table. Another guy at the table was also in a wheelchair.

“He got arrested for drunk driving. He was going down the middle of the road in his chair,” Darren whispered.

“Are any of you quads normal people?” I joked.

Darren shrugged. “What’s normal?”

As usual, some of the crowd couldn’t seem to stop watching the wheelchairs. People are always surprised to see someone in a wheelchair having a good time. It’s as if they think life in a wheelchair is only good for watching TV. One woman came by and patted Darren’s arm.

“I wanted to tell you I think you’re so brave. I’m sure you’ll get well some day,” she said, her voice wobbling.

“But I am well,” Darren said.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction with a grade 3.5 reading level representative of the Orca Soundings label; themes include self-discovery, family dynamics, and coming-of-age as well as abusive relationships.

Read-ons: Other titles by Beth Goobie that include similar themes are her 1994 novel *Mission Impossible* and as well as her 2005 title *Something Girl*. *One More Step* by Sheree Fitch (2002) depicts a teenage boy with a voice just as angry as Dime's. Beverley Brenna's (2005) *Wild Orchid* and Alyxandra Harvey-Fitzhenry's (2008) *Broken* offer perspectives on first boyfriends that compare with Dime's. Eric Walters' (2000) *Rebound* offers another look at societal response to disability.

Haworth-Attard, B. (2002). *Irish chain*. Toronto: HarperCollins.

This historical fiction novel relates events occurring alongside the Halifax explosion of 1917 as 12 year old Rose Dunlea is enveloped in the tragedy of the surrounding community. Told by her teachers that she is "slow," "retarded," and "lazy," Rose has severe learning disabilities that have prevented her from reading or writing with ease. Yet by using pieces of the Irish chain quilt, she demonstrates masterful storytelling, and offers exceptional leadership in the face of danger.

Excerpt:

I studied the other patches, silently repeating to myself whom they belonged to and the stories tied to each. Winnie's question came back to me. Why did I always want to tell the stories of the quilt? I'd not really thought about that before, but now that I did, I realized it was because of a

belief I had. I believed there was a key somewhere inside the Irish Chain quilt—a key to how to be brave and strong like Great-grandmother Rose. And if I kept telling the stories, maybe someday I might find it.

Description: Intermediate historical fiction; themes include self-acceptance and the value of storytelling.

Read-ons: Another title from Haworth-Attard (2001)—*Flying Geese*—makes a nice companion read as it also involves quilting as a life affirming act, as does Deborah Hopkinson’s (1993) picture book *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*. The value of storytelling is explored in Marcus Sedgwick’s (2001) *Floodland*, a futuristic fantasy where a young girl realizes that stories are how people survive, how they remember whom they are and where they are from. Jean Little’s (1997) *The Belonging Place* identifies similar themes of growing up in transition, as does Alice Walsh’s (2006) *A Sky Black with Crows*. Penny Draper’s (2006) *Terror at Turtle Mountain* also focuses on Canadian disasters and is told from the perspective of a young girl whose self-doubts mirror Rose’s. *Ramona’s World* by Beverly Cleary (1999), *Freak the Mighty* and *Max the Mighty* by Rodman Philbrick (1993; 1998), Jamie Gilson’s (1980) *Do Banana’s Chew Gum?* and Carol Fenner’s (1995) *Yolanda’s Genius*, are other titles for a similar age group that involve characters who have learning disabilities. Julie Johnston’s (2006) *A Very Fine Line* also explores the weight of gifts and challenges.

Holeman, L. (2002). *Search of the moon king's daughter*. Toronto: Tundra Books.

This historical fiction saga involves a young girl's quest to find her brother, sold as a chimney sweep in Victorian England. Emmaline's little brother, Tommy, is born to an alcoholic mother; although not explicitly defined, it is possible his hearing impairment was caused by prenatal alcohol abuse in addition to a fever he had as a baby and brain injuries sustained in a fall. After the death of their father from cholera, their mother suffers a factory-related injury and becomes addicted to laudanum, at which point she sells Tommy to a master sweep. In her desperate search to find him, Emmaline experiences the appalling conditions that workers in the 19th century endured as well as the strong class distinctions made during that time and place.

Excerpt:

When Tommy was about three, Emmaline realized he was afraid of the dark. He'd shake his head no no no when Emmaline blew out the rushlight at night, and she'd hold him close, humming against his temple. The vibration of her lips against his scalp seemed to calm him, although she knew he couldn't hear the melody.

Some nights the moon would be almost visible through the ceaseless thick smoke belched out of the high factory chimneys, although its light couldn't reach down into the knotted maze of narrow courts. But on those nights, if it wasn't too cold, Emmaline would take the little boy outside.

“Look, Tommy,” she’d say, pointing at the round orb that would appear and then disappear in the perpetually murky sky over the city. “Our father was the Moon King.” She’d touch her chin, then make a circle around the moon with her hands and move the circle onto her head. Touching her chin meant Father to Tommy. “Moon King,” she’d repeat, and Tommy would make the same motions with his small hands.

“You’re my smart boy,” she’s say, and then whisper about their father and what it had been like to live in a village; how one day she’d take him back and they’d live together in a lovely cottage and look up at the moon every night.

Description: Young adult historical fiction; themes include hope and the enduring power of love.

Read-ons: Charles Dickens (1838) offers a compelling companion read in *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*. Sharon McKay’s (2004) *Esther* presents a similarly emotionally charged and dramatic rendering of early 18th century France, although with somewhat more mature content. *To Dance at the Palais Royale* by Janet McNaughton (1996) is another gripping historical read.

Horrocks, A. (2006). *Almost Eden*. Toronto: Tundra Books.

Twelve-year-old Elsie deals with her mother’s mental illness, isolated by feelings of guilt and confusion in the fictional Mennonite community of Hopfield, Canada. Serious subject matter is presented in a style younger readers can absorb regarding the course of the summer of 1970 where Elsie’s mom is in the local mental institution taking shock

treatments. The story follows Elsie's feelings of responsibility regarding her mother's breakdown, her relationship with Beth, her bossy older sister, and her forgetfulness of family responsibilities with regard to Lena, her younger sister, as well as her loss of faith in God.

Excerpt:

My heart was thudding in my chest still. Mom didn't act like she was mad at me. I quickly kissed her forehead and tried not to let it show on my face that she smelled funny. Or that she looked so awfully tired. Her eyes didn't shine like they usually did. Mom was maybe starting to turn into one of the zombies.

"Let's go for a walk," I blurted, because I had to get out of there and I had to get Mom out of there, too. "Are you thirsty? I'm thirsty. Let's go get a soft drink."

Mom moved slowly. I almost had to drag her, back out through the lounge and past the reception desk. She told the nurse she'd be outside with her daughters.

Outside Mom's eyes didn't look so dead anymore. We walked across the street to the service station. Mom didn't have any money on her, but I had brought some change. I dropped fifteen cents into the slot and slid a bottle of Grape Crush out of the rack for Lena. Mom wanted an Orange Crush, and I got myself a Mountain Dew.

Then we walked back to Eden with our soft drinks and sat on a bench on the back lawn.

“So, how goes it?” I didn’t know what else to say, and I wanted for Mom to say, “On two legs, like a gander,” because then we could smile and maybe even pretend everything was like always.

Description: Intermediate historical fiction; themes include self-discovery and coming-of-age.

Read-ons: Lucy Maud Montgomery’s (1908) *Anne of Green Gables* offers a comparatively spunky character who despairs at her own mistakes. Miriam Toews’ (2004) *A Complicated Kindness* is an adult crossover novel that portrays another Mennonite girl coming-of-age, although it is geared to older readers. Elizabeth Berg’s (1997) *Joy School* is an additional crossover novel that serves the young adult market, and Katie, its protagonist, is a 12 year old with striking similarities to Elsie. Martine Leavitt’s *Heck, Superhero* also follows a character dealing with a parent’s mental illness.

Huser, G. (2003). *Stitches*. Toronto: Greenwood.

This book is set in the fictional Western Canadian town of Acton and explores the friendship between Travis, a boy in junior high-school whose artistic talents direct him towards a future in sewing and design, and Chantelle, a classmate with a rare bone disease. Bullied since grade school, Travis perseveres in designing puppets and dreams of a place “where there are no Shon Dockers” and “where you could do what you wanted and no one would make fun of you. Where your best friend could be a girl. Where people wouldn’t look away when they saw someone like Chantelle.” Travis stands up for Chantelle when even his family call her a

“poor little thing,” but, without anyone to prevent the bullying that eventually puts him in hospital, he decides to move to the city to attend art school where “no one seems to mind how different you are.” The ending implies that some day Chantelle will also move away to the city, leaving a lasting impression that some problems can’t be solved, just escaped.

Excerpt:

When we got to the edge of town with the hospital parking lot on one side of the street and Gumley’s field on the other, Chantelle stumbled and fell. She just lay there for a moment in the ditch, not moving, like a small wounded animal.

“Let me help--” I knelt beside her.

Her face was twisted, as if she were crying, but there were no tears, no sound.

“I hate this,” she whispered, finally.

“What?”

“Everything. Being a freak.”

“You’re not--”

“A freak,” Chantelle repeated. “It’s not fair.”

“Let me help you--”

“No,” she said, struggling to her feet. For a couple of seconds I thought she was going to topple over again.

“I don’t think you’re a freak,” I said.

“You don’t count,” she grumbled.

“What do you mean, I don’t count?” I said, breaking the silence.

“You don’t count because you’re my friend.”

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction, winner of a Governor General’s Award for Children’s Fiction (text); themes include self-discovery and self-acceptance as well as bullying and the power to endure.

Read-ons: Katherine Paterson’s (1977) *Bridge to Terabithia* offers connecting characters and themes, as does Christopher Paul Curtis’ (2007) *Elijah of Buxton* about a pre-teen determined to become a ‘man’s man’ but struggling with emotional fragility. A more mature read that also deals with the power to endure is Robert Cormier’s (1974) *The Chocolate War*.

Janz, H. (2004). *Sparrows on wheels*. Edmonton, AB: DocCrip Press.

Originally written as a Master’s thesis, this semi-autobiographical novel presents the story of Tallia, a young person with cerebral palsy, who, through the course of the story, grows from an anxious grade seven student in a special school to the co-editor of the school newspaper and a high-school senior considering university courses. It is not Tallia’s choice to leave Inglewood School Hospital and attend a regular high school, although one of her peers made that transition, with conflicting results. Much of the omniscient narration includes factual details about the day-to-day life of characters with physical disabilities in the pre-integration era, and while these facts slow the plot, they also add a layer of richness to the story’s content.

Excerpt:

“You certainly had a restless night last night—I must have turned you at least seven times,” Anna remarked as she began sponging down Tallia’s upper body.

“Yeah, I know,” Tallia sighed. “I just couldn’t sleep.”

“First day jitters?”

“Guess so.

“But you’re an old hand at this,” Anna reasoned. “You’ve been going to Inglewood since nursery school.”

“Yeah, but I’m going to be in junior high now. I’ll be involved in lots more stuff—there’s the Students’ Union, noon-hour sports, the yearbook, planning for the year end camp...Maybe I’ll even get onto the school paper.”

“Well, you certainly seem to be serious about this writing business.” Anna deftly wrung out and resoaped the towel. “You’ve been cooped up in the house writing all summer. It was all I could do to get you to go outside once in a while. Just look at how pale you still are!”

“I wheeled over to Connie’s a few times,” countered Tallia. “Besides, the only way to get good at writing is to write—that’s what Mr. Harris says.”

Description: Historical young adult novel adapted from academic writing; themes include self-actualization and coming-of-age.

Read-ons: Don Trembath's (1996) *The Tuesday Cafe* portrays a protagonist with similar dreams of being a writer. *Mabel Riley* by Marthe Jocelyn (2004) also explores a young teen's quest to find her voice.

Johnston, J. (2006). *A Very Fine Line*. Toronto: Tundra Books.

Rosalind is a 13 year old in a family of girls who decides that coming-of-age isn't for her, and works hard to become the boy she believes her mother has always wanted. Peers in small-town Ontario in 1941 make her cross-gendered presentation difficult, but she perseveres as "Ross" until a crush on Adrian, a young man who has been hired to tutor her at home, causes her to think differently about womanhood. One of the complications for Rosalind is that she struggles with second-sight, and stories told her by elderly aunts confirm the potential of this gift in a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, which she actually is, until she 'becomes' a son through clothes and gesture. The actuality of her birth order has been hidden until now through the banishment of a sister with intellectual disabilities, sent to live with aunts. Aspects of this sister, Lucy, ring with gothic description and she operates as a metaphor in this novel about difference and belonging. This is a title where many characters are presented as "different," from Rosalind's own giftedness and gender confusion, to Adrian's lameness, to cousin Corny's birthmarked face, in addition to Lucy. Even Rosalind's elder sister, a female medical doctor at a time when women are expected to prioritize marriage and children over

careers, is a character worth consideration for her actions as a ‘rule-breaker.’

Excerpt:

The door opened a crack, just wide enough for me to glimpse an eye peering out, and then it slammed in my face. Behind the door I could hear mad Lucy shouting gibberish. I looked back at Corny, beckoning him over, but he was swinging the ax above a thick piece of wood and bringing it down with all his might. His glancing blow produced merely a wood chip. Swearing under his breath, he tried again.

Abruptly, the door swung open and Lucy’s slack-featured face bent to mine. “Little pig, little pig, let me come in,” she shrieked, and lowered her voice. “No-no, by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin.”

“Lucy?” I could hear Great-Aunt Eileen’s voice.

“You’ll never come in.”

“Lucy!” A commanding tone now.

Lucy swooped at me before I could run, and crushing me tightly against her—her long thick hair in my face, suffocating me—she swung me into the kitchen.

The next moment Eileen was there, grappling with her to free me, wheedling, bribing. Lucy relinquished me in favour of the new pencil Eileen offered. She lumbered to the table, sat down, and was soon busy, her face bent closely over a sheet of paper.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction with shades of magic realism; themes include respect for diversity and coming-of-age.

Read-ons: Other titles exploring the burdens of second-sight include Anne Louise MacDonald's (2009) *Seeing Red*, Cora Taylor's (1985) *Julie*, and Robin Stevenson's (2008) *Impossible Things* as well as Carol Matas's psychic adventure series beginning with her 1997 title *The Freak*. Exceptionality and birth order is further explored in Patricia C. Wrede's (2009) *Thirteenth Child*, and Barbara Haworth-Attard's (2002) *Irish Chain* also considers the weight of gifts and challenges. Other titles that employ fairy tale imagery include Iain Lawrence's (2006) *Gemini Summer* and *Broken* by Alyxandra Harvey-Fitzhenry (2008). Glen Huser's (2003) *Stitches* also explores issues related to gender roles. References to Lucy could be compared to Charlotte Brontë's (1847) Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Other references within the text include George Bernard Shaw's (1924) play *Saint Joan*, about Joan of Arc, and William Shakespeare's (1623) *Macbeth*.

Lawrence, I. (2006). *Gemini summer*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Magic realism transforms this poignant story about a boy's loss of his brother. Set in 1965 Hog's Hollow (a fictionalized Toronto suburb), tragedy strikes just when each member of the River family is bent on following a personal dream. After the death of Danny's brother, Beau, and Beau's eventual reincarnation as a dog, Danny vows to take Beau to Cape Canaveral to satisfy what had been his brother's dream as well as assuage his own guilt. The novel's antagonist, a boy who is initially blamed for

Beau's death, is Dopey Colvig, a child depicted completely through atypical physical characteristics (a large head and absence of speech) suggesting autism or another developmental disorder. It is Dopey's unexplained violent antagonism to the brothers that offers good fuel for classroom discussion.

Excerpt:

Older than Danny, younger than Beau, Dopey was huge for his age. He was meaner than mean. For no reason at all, he hated Danny River, and he guarded his end of the Hollow like a troll, lurking on the paths through the cottonwoods, waiting for Danny to pass. At any moment he might leap from the bushes or jump up from the wooden bridge. Once he chased Danny through the woods with a realtor's sign, swinging it like a broadaxe, smashing through the bushes on Danny's heels.

Description: Intermediate historical fiction and a winner of a Governor General's Award for Children's Fiction (text); themes include death of a sibling and following your dreams. Because this story is framed in fairy tale imagery, Dopey Colvig, lurking like a troll under the bridge in the woods, appears as a believable figure of evil. An exploration of how this type of framing contributes to negative stereotypes about people with physical differences is a theme well worth exploring.

Read-ons: Susan Patron's (2006) *The Higher Power of Lucky* also involves a

young protagonist recovering from a death—the death of her mother— through a run-away adventure with a dog, HMS Beagle. Another book that explores loss in the hopeful style of *Gemini Summer* is Katherine Paterson’s (1977) *Bridge to Terabithia*. Other titles with stereotypical villains include Frieda Wishinsky’s (2005) *Queen of the Toilet Bowl* and Colin Frizzell’s (2006) *Chill* as well as *The Proof that Ghosts Exist* by Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman (2008). Fairy tale imagery also frames the plot in *Broken* by Alyxandra Harvey-Fitzhenry (2008), and Cynthia Nugent’s (2004) *Francesca and the Magic Bike* includes the Dickensian technique of naming as representation of character.

Leavitt, M. *Heck superhero*. Red Deer Press.

In this title, a 13 year old boy deals with his mother’s mental illness by trying to pretend things are okay, imagining himself a superhero. After they are evicted from their apartment, Hector spends four days on the street, not knowing where his mother is but certain that she is in a phase of illness Heck calls “hypertime.” It is in this urban setting where Heck’s new friendship with a boy called Marion teaches him the difference between imagination and another type of being gone that is permanent; Marion’s own mental illness and eventual suicide force Heck to admit that he and his mother need help.

Excerpt:

“We have to stop pretending that Everything’s Okay. Because we need some help. Don’t we, Mom?”

She shrugged.

“I know you lost your job at the Pepper Bar.”

She nodded at her feet.

“We have to trust some people. We have to ask for help.

Everything isn't okay, Mom, but it will be if we get some help, right?”

She looked at him, and her eyes were twelve and her mouth was sixty. Even her body couldn't stay in one time and dimension. He was breaking the trust. Tears came to her eyes, and Heck suddenly couldn't think straight.

Then he remembered the art assignment for Mr. Bandras, and he remembered he was going topworld. He wasn't going to play himself and his mom out of the microuniverse anymore. He was going to deal with the one they were in.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; themes include self-discovery and coming-of-age as well as living with mental illness.

Read-ons: Dianne Linden's (2008) *Shimmerdogs* is a story for a similar age group about a young boy trying to cope in difficult circumstances. Sarah Ellis' (2006) *Odd Man Out* further explores stereotypes about mental illness as a young boy discovers facts about his deceased father. Tim Wynne-Jones' (1998) *Stephen Fair* follows a 15 year old boy who is also struggling with terrifying events in his life before returning home to his mother. *Looking for X* by Deborah Ellis (2006) portrays another young protagonist spending a series of days on the street. *Slake's Limbo* by Felice Holman (1974) is another young adult novel about

living on the streets, in this case, the interior of the New York subway; it connects, as well, to an intermediate graphic novel: Brian Selznik's (2007)

Invention of Hugo Cabret.

Lekich, J. (2002). *The losers' club*. Toronto: Annick Press.

Alex Sherwood, a high school kid with cerebral palsy, becomes the leader of a group of so-called losers. When his father goes into hiding, Alex moves in with another friend whose family is also away, and the two boys become acquainted with a neighbour nicknamed "The Beast," Harry Beardsley, who is persuaded to act as their surrogate parent. Harry eventually decides to go and visit his own son, a boy who also has cerebral palsy. A bet regarding a Christmas display contest earns Alex the opportunity to save his friends once and for all from bully Jerry Whitman. Other than using his disability for put-downs by other students, the author includes it as a minor aspect of Alex's characterization. Metafictive elements appear in the narrator's habit of speaking directly to the reader.

Excerpt:

I should explain that I'm currently the only kid at Marshall McLuhan High with a hall pass that gets me out of class a full five minutes early. That's because the administration thinks I might get trampled by a stampede of "thoughtless individuals" if they let me out at the same time as everybody else. For years, I've been using metal crutches to get around. I'm what you'd call "permanently disabled" if you were being polite. People are not always polite.

I don't like being disabled, of course. The crutches make a creepy hollow sound when I'm moving down the empty halls, and certain thoughtless individuals are always offering to help me down the stairs so they can get out early and be first in line at the cafeteria. I never let anybody help me that way. It's one of my rules.

Besides the hall pass, the only good thing about walking on crutches is that nobody tries to stuff me in a locker. Even Jerry Whitman, who runs a very profitable extortion ring and intimidates a decent cross section of the losers in the student body, refuses to shake me down for my share of "loser bucks." While Jerry relishes loser bucks more than any other kind of money, he says it's bad public relations to injure a poster boy for the handicapped.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; themes include bullying and making the best of difficult situations.

Read-ons: Titles connecting on the basis of their high school humour include Don Trembath's (1997) *A Fly Named Alfred* and Gordon Korman's (1987) *A Semester in the Life of a Garbage Bag*. Ted L. Nancy's (1997) *Letters from a Nut* provide a good connection to a letter to Alex's dad in Chapter Two. Another title depicting physical disability as merely one aspect of characterization is Mary Downing Hahn's (1996) *Following My Own Footsteps*.

Little, J. (2005). *Forward, Shakespeare!* Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

This simple junior novel is narrated from the third-person perspective of a dog protagonist. Shakespeare is a seeing-eye pup, trained

to be a Rescue Dog, and assigned to Tim, an angry, blind teen, who is staying at The Seeing Eye residence in Morristown, New Jersey. As Shakespeare accompanies Tim on his journey back to Guelph, Ontario, and a healthy, hopeful future, there are a few amusing turns in the plot, including the scenario of two guide dogs accidentally switched with each other.

Excerpt:

It wasn't quite as simple as Shakespeare had imagined. That very night, the dog heard his new master crying again in the darkness. Shakespeare knew what was wrong now; he could smell the boy's fear. But it worried the boy far more than the dog. The Lab was certain that once Tim got outside with him and the instructor, he would forget his overwhelming anxiety.

Shakespeare lay and listened to the muffled sobs. Maybe he should jump up on the bed and nuzzle Tim's neck or ear. But Tessa had said that Seeing Eye dogs were not allowed up on beds. He would wait a day and see if things improved.

Description: Junior realistic fiction, but because of the story's content, it could work for older, reluctant readers; themes include self-acceptance, self-confidence, and overcoming obstacles.

Read-ons: Jean Little's (2004) prequel, *Rescue Pup*, explores Shakespeare's training as a Seeing Eye dog. Another helpful canine is depicted in Christina Minaki's (2007) *Zoe's Extraordinary Holiday Adventures*. Other texts

told from an animal's point of view include particular selections from Tiffany Stone's (2004) poetry book: *Floyd the Flamingo and his Flock of Friends*, Avi's (2001) *The Good Dog*, Glenda Goertzen's (2005) *The Prairie Dogs*, and Beverly Cleary's (1964) *Ribsy*. Another connection is the non-fiction title *Working Like a Dog: The Story of Working Dogs Through History* by Gena K. Gorrell (2003). Barbara Smucker's (1987) *Jacob's Little Giant* is an additional junior title that explores self-confidence.

Little, J. (2000). *Willow and Twig*. Toronto: Penguin Canada.

Willow is a 10 year old girl caring for her 4 year old brother in Vancouver through the disappearance of their mother, drug-addicted Angel, and the death of the family friend where they have been living. Child and Family Services arrange for the children to fly to Toronto, to a grandmother Willow has not seen in a long time and who has never met Twig—a little boy who was born an addict, has attention problems, and is hearing impaired as a result of a beating. Uncle Humphrey, their grandmother's brother, who is blind, offers love and support, but Aunt Con, when she comes to stay, is at first unfriendly and judgemental. The heart of the story is the bond between Willow and Twig, and how these children make the transition to their new home.

Excerpt:

Aunt Con was actually smiling at Twig, who was offering her a drink from one of the juice glasses. He had spilled a lot of water over himself and some onto Aunt Con but he was now holding it to her lips and, to

Willow's astonishment, she tried to drink. They were all surprised when her teeth chattered against the rim. Willow bit back a hysterical burst of laughter and then relaxed as she saw Aunt Con laugh herself. The girl knelt and steadied the tumbler while her great-aunt drained it.

"Good. The bleeding has stopped," Willow muttered, as she lifted the towel enough to peer at the wound underneath.

Then Twig was back with a seedless green grape.

"Ope, ope," he ordered, pressing it against Aunt Con's lips.

When she opened her lips to speak, he popped the grape into her mouth, jumped up and ran away back to the kitchen.

"Good," Aunt Con said, and chewed. Before Willow could think what to do next, her little brother was back with a single potato chip.

"Ope," he commanded.

Aunt Con hastily swallowed what was left of the grape and opened her mouth obediently. In went the potato chip.

Twig beamed. Willow pulled herself together, recalled you were supposed to keep the patient warm and ran for a wool blanket.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; themes include adapting to change and sibling relationships.

Read-ons: Julie Johnston's (1994) *Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me* (a Governor General's Award winner for children's text) also offers happy outcomes for a 15 year old foster child as does another intermediate novel by Jean Little (2007): *Dancing Through the Snow*. Other parallels can be seen in Linda

Holeman's (2002) historical fiction novel *Search of the Moon King's Daughter* as well as the fantasy novel *The Third Eye* by Mahtab Narsimhan (2007).

McBay, B., & Heneghan, J. (2003). *Waiting for Sarah*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

Following a serious accident, Mike is assisted in his transition back to high school in False Creek, Vancouver, by Sarah, a younger girl he believes has been sent to help him with a yearbook project. Mike's loss of mobility has created a bitterness that takes time to dissolve, but eventually Sarah wins his heart. It is then that Mike realizes she is actually the ghost of a young girl murdered by a teacher—and that it is up to him to prove Mr. Dorfman's guilt.

Excerpt:

Meanwhile, to work. Make a start. He pulled out a file box and blew off the dust before letting it fall into his lap. It was heavy. He wheeled over and lifted the box up onto the table and suddenly felt closed in, trapped in his wheelchair and a prisoner in the dimly lighted room. He felt the shortage of breath that signalled a panic attack. His heart started thumping and his lungs tightened like fists. Don't panic, he told himself, swallowing and sucking in deep breaths and letting his shoulders and arms hang limply the way the therapist at the Rehab Centre had taught him whenever his heart and lungs acted up on him like this. Don't panic, he always told himself, relax and drink the air, like sucking a thick

milkshake through a straw, easy does it, close your eyes, one breath at a time, stay calm.

Description: Intermediate fantasy; themes include adapting to change and the power of friendships.

Read-ons: Another boy's relationship with a ghost is outlined in Lesley Choyce's (2004) *Smoke and Mirrors*. Kit Pearson's (2007) *Awake and Dreaming* takes a protagonist's responsibilities to a ghost one step further. Pat Hancock's (2003) *Haunted Canada: True Ghost Stories* offers another look at mysterious phenomena.

MacDonald, A. L.(2009). *Seeing red*. Toronto: Kids Can Press.

Fourteen-year-old Frankie discovers he can dream the future, his only claim to fame, and yet even with this talent he cannot prevent disaster. Caught in confusing circumstances, Frankie presents feelings common to young people striving to control unpredictable situations. Descriptions of Joey, a kid with autism whom Frankie babysits and eventually chaperones during riding therapy at a local stable, are rendered with care, as are other characters with special needs who shift in and out of the therapeutic riding context. Through the course of the novel, Frankie explores his fears, including his fear of horses, as well as a developing friendship with Maura-Lee, a girl who also has extrasensory abilities.

Excerpt:

"Your turn," Susan said to Joey. "You saw how the others got on. Do you think you can do that?"

Joey nodded. He held his arms up and his father carefully buckled the wide belt around him. Maura-Lee led Prince closer. His thick legs took scuffling steps in the sand. Sunlight streaming in the big doors bounced brown highlights off his dark fur. With his fat pink tongue leaking out the right corner of his mouth, he suddenly looked much more goofy than scary.

“Up you get, then,” said Susan. She motioned to Joey.

Joey started rocking. His father frowned and looked expectantly at me. So did Susan. For that matter, so did Joey. Looking and waiting.

For what? It was up to him to get on the horse. I couldn't do it for him!

I said, “Remember, a horse is just a car-sized Pookey.”

Joey nodded and said, “You first.”

“What?”

“You first.”

Me? My throat clamped shut. Me on a horse? No way! Joey just rocked...and waited.

Susan passed me a riding helmet. I had no choice.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; themes include self-acceptance, conquering fears, and friendships.

Read-ons: René Schmidt's (2008) *Leaving Fletchville* explores similar themes of friendship as well as racial prejudice, as does Ted Stenhouse's (2001) *Across the Steel River*. Jean Little's (1986) *Different Dragons* also involves conquering fears. Cora Taylor's (1985) *Julie*, Julie Johnston's (2006) *A Very Fine*

Line, Robin Stevenson's (2008) *Impossible Things*, and Carol Matas's psychic adventure series beginning with *The Freak* (1997), explore situations where children identify themselves as having extrasensory perception and struggle with their gifts.

McKay, S. (2000). *Charlie Wilcox*. Toronto: Penguin Books.

Charlie, born into a Newfoundland sealing family, tries to prove his competence in light of the stigma associated with his club foot. After the foot is repaired through surgery, he stows away at age 14 on what he thinks is a fishing vessel, emerging days later bound for France and World War I.

Excerpt:

"Hey there, peg-leg, step on it," Clint doubled over with laughter.

"Shake a leg," cracked Phil.

Clint and Phil had a repertoire of ten or so insults. Sometimes Charlie could wait them out, ignore them, but not today. He dropped the hoop. He turned, slowly, scanning the street for anyone, anyone at all. Charlie weighed his options. Stay and fight, or run?

"Well, look, do ya think the sissy is going to fight? All on his own?"

One side of Clint's mouth turned up in a sneer. His eyes were black and marble hard. "Where is your little pal?"

Charlie stepped out of the hoop and away from the water just as Phil landed a rock right on the pail. Jeeze, not only did it tip over but one of the buckets looked split.

“You’re a case, Phil,” snarled Charlie.

“Where’s your mammy? She goin’ ta come save her little cripple?”

Clint stepped closer, closer, closer still.

“Yea, and you’d look right good getting whipped by a woman,” said Charlie. Was calling his mother a woman bad? He wasn’t sure but it didn’t sound right.

“Ya stupid little begger,” Clint closed in on Charlie and gave him a shove. Charlie stumbled backward and landed on his butt and elbows. It didn’t take much to land Charlie in the dirt. He was half the size of both boys and with a club foot—well, he was never too steady anyway.

Description: Young adult historical fiction introducing ideas about how disability is socially, rather than physically, constructed; themes include the brutality of war and coming-of-age.

Read-ons: Other war-based accounts for a similar age group are found in Carol Matas’s *After the War* (1996) and *The Garden* (1997), John Wilson’s (2003) *And in the Morning*, and David Richards’ (1999) *The Lady at Batoche*. Janet McNaughton’s (1994) *Catch Me Once, Catch Me Twice* offers a contrasting picture of Newfoundland. Marguerite de Angeli’s (1949) Newbery Medal winner *The Door in the Wall* offers another depiction of an adventuresome protagonist with a physical disability. A title intended for younger readers, but whose bravado and clever language make it a possible match for *Charlie Wilcox*, is Sarah Ellis’s (2003) *The Several Lives of Orphan Jack*. John Lekitch’s (2002) *The Losers’ Club* offers a similar look at physical disability and the taunts of bullies.

McLintock, N. (2008). *Dead silence*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic.

After Mike skips out on his friend Sal, he discovers that Sal has been stabbed to death near their high school in an inner city Toronto neighborhood. Bystanders give mixed messages, so Mike starts asking some deeper questions of his own. Various suspects are considered and cleared, including Alex, a young man with an intellectual disability whose own family expect he's guilty. Eventually the mystery is solved in a way that lets readers retrospectively consider the clues.

Excerpt:

“Teddy was wrong about Sal and Staci,” I said. “They were just friends. You shouldn’t believe anything Teddy or any of his friends say. You shouldn’t protect them, either.”

“I’m not protecting them.” But he still wouldn’t look at me. I was pretty sure he was hiding something.

“They’re a bunch of jerks, Alex. Their idea of a good time is to hassle people. They were hassling Staci just before Sal was killed.”

Finally he met my eyes. “What do you mean?”

“They were making fun of her because she tutors. They were making fun of the kids she tutors. That’s why Sal went over to help her. Because they were making fun of the kids she tutors and Staci got mad at them and things started to get rough.”

“Staci tutors me sometimes,” Alex said in a soft voice.

Description: Young adult mystery; themes involve bullying and societal stereotypes.

Read-ons: Kristin Butcher's (2009) mystery *Return to Bone Tree Hill* would make a good companion read as Jessica searches for the killer of a school companion much as Mike is desperate to solve the murder of his friend. Graham McNamee's (2003) *Acceleration*, and *Whalesinger* by Welwyn Katz (1990) are other novels for similar age groups, told with adventure and energy, each touching in a peripheral way on disability themes. Margaret Thompson's (2000) *Eyewitness* is another title involving a murder as well as cultural stereotypes.

McNicoll, S. (2003). *A different kind of beauty*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

With alternating chapters told in the separate voices of two teenagers, this sequel to *Bringing Up Beauty* cleverly juxtaposes scenes about the training of a guide dog with the story of the young man who is eventually to receive the dog. Elizabeth's difficulty is learning to let go of an animal she has grown to love, as well as a previous boyfriend. Kyle's story is heavier and relates to diabetes-induced blindness and a failed relationship with his old girlfriend.

Excerpt:

"I watched Discovery Channel the other day," Shawna interrupted.

"And they had this show on dogs that help handicapped people. Why don't we get one?"

"I'm not handicapped, I'm blind," I said, trying for some more mashed

potatoes.

“But you’re chicken, too. That’s a handicap.”

“Am not. Quit kicking my chair.” But she was right. I was a chicken—afraid of the dark, afraid of being alone and worst of all, afraid of dogs. You couldn’t trust them. One moment they were friendly, the next they would rip into your face.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include dealing with loss, teen relationships, and self-acceptance.

Read-ons: Teen relationships are further explored in *Bone Dance* by Martha Brooks (1997) and Stephanie Meyer’s vampire series beginning with the 2006 title *Twilight*. Self-acceptance and first-love are two of the themes in Madeleine L’Engle’s (1962) *A Wrinkle in Time*, as well as *Lean Mean Machines* by Michele Marineau (2000) and translated from the French by Susan Ouriou—a title also written from alternating points of view.

McNicoll, S. (2006). *Beauty returns*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

This realistic fiction novel continues the story introduced in two earlier works: *Bringing Up Beauty* and *A Different Kind of Beauty* and, as in the latter, the chapters are told in the alternating teen voices of Elizabeth and Kyle. Liz is adjusting to life at home with her sister and Teal, her sister’s little boy; Kyle is a senior at high school dealing with the prejudices of others regarding his blindness as well as his own resistance to health restrictions. Liz and Kyle’s relationship is not an easy one, complicated by concerned parents. Kyle’s death corresponds with

traditional literary stereotypes about people with disabilities while at the same time contrasting with readers' understandings of the strong and independent character Kyle has become.

Excerpt:

Why hasn't Elizabeth returned my calls? I made enough of them. Perhaps that's the problem. I sounded too desperate. Why would she want to go out with a blind guy anyway?

*To take my mind off Elizabeth, I decide to work on my school project for Mr. Veen. I've gone on the Internet to search for audio books that might satisfy him. The special program on my computer reads my screen to me. I've put the voice on high speed, but it's still too slow. I stop when I hear the word *Blindness*. It's a Nobel Prize-winning novel by José Saramago. How can Mr. Veen argue with that?*

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include dealing with loss and self-acceptance, with an interesting social commentary on attitudes towards people who are visually impaired.

Read-ons: As above for *A Different Kind of Beauty*.

Minaki, C. (2007). *Zoe's extraordinary holiday adventures*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

As this junior novel begins, Zoe and her Labrador retriever Ella are not having the kind of adventures Zoe craves. To make matters worse, when her friend Anna is absent from school, Zoe is embarrassed by the way other kids treat her in response to her use of a wheelchair. Cultural

themes are prominent in the story as the class explores seasonal holidays, further emphasizing differences and universal connections.

Excerpt:

When Mrs. Green told the class that they were about to break into pairs and play the game, Zoe looked for Anna to be her partner. They both had lots of practice at dreidl.

But Anna's desk was empty. For a moment, Zoe had forgotten that her friend was home that day, because she had a cold.

Zoe looked down at Ella sitting beside her. This was another one of those times when her beautiful dog couldn't do anything to help; she couldn't be her partner in the game. Everyone else in the class was finding a partner fast. On every table Zoe looked at, there was a top spinning, with people playing and laughing.

Description: Junior realistic fiction; themes include self-discovery and self-acceptance as well as multiculturalism.

Read-ons: Elizabeth Helfman's (1993) title *On Being Sarah* presents another girl who yearns for adventure and uses supports for a physical disability, as does Jean Little's (1962) *Mine for Keeps*. Beverly Cleary's (1968) *Ramona* books offer a similarly spunky heroine, beginning with *Ramona the Pest*. Multicultural themes for similar age groups are found in Rachna Gilmore's (2000) *Mina's Spring of Colors* and *Christmas at Wapos Bay* by Jordan Wheeler and Dennis Jackson (2005).

Nugent, C. (2004). *Francesca and the Magic Bike*. Vancouver, BC: Raincoast Books.

A new friendship between 10 year old Francesca and an elderly neighbor who is visually impaired blossoms into an adventure that moves them both into happier contexts. Augusta offers Frankie a chance to find a family heirloom while Augusta guides Ron, Frankie's dad, into a healthier lifestyle that social services won't object to in terms of raising a daughter. Riding Hippogriff, a bike whose 'emotionally responsive metal' offers intuitive support, and with Augusta's dog Dan for company, Frankie sets out to find a ring that's been lost since Augusta's childhood and whose recovery, in the end, brings two feuding sisters together again.

Excerpt:

"Now!" announced Augusta, "for five minutes I want you to feel how I feel, to know how impossible it is to be blind." The old lady untied a silk scarf from her neck, and pulling Frankie forward, felt her face with cool, papery hands. She tied the smooth, heavy silk around Frankie's eyes, then slumped back exhausted against the pillows. "What do you see?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Precisely! Nothing."

They sat in silence except for the thump thump of Frankie's heels against the side of the bed.

"Where's my walking stick?" Augusta asked suddenly.

“By the door.”

“Well, go and get it for me, child. Don’t dawdle.” Frankie reached up to pull off the blindfold but Augusta put a hand on her arm and said, “Do it with the blindfold on.”

Frankie slid down and started confidently for the door, but as she stepped forward, her hand caught the bedside table. Bottles of pills, drops and syrups clashed together on their porcelain tray and a glass of water skipped off and bounced on the carpet. Water arced through the air and splashed on Frankie’s legs. “Eek!”

Description: Intermediate magic realism; themes include the power of imagination and family relationships.

Read-ons: Susan Patron’s (2006) *The Higher Power of Lucky* has a protagonist of a similar age and character engaging in a remarkable journey. *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funk (2003) offers fantasy for this age group, also reminiscent of *The Bad Beginning* and other work by Lemony Snicket (1999), Arthur Slade’s (2008) *Jolted: Newton Starker’s Rules for Survival*, and Roald Dahl’s (1980) *The Twits* where the Dickensian technique of attaching names representative of characters is employed.

Oppel, K. (2007). *Darkwing*. Toronto: HarperCollins.

Set in the Paleocene epoch, this is a prequel to Oppel’s previous bat books (*Silverwing*, *Sunwing*, and *Firewing*). Dusk is the lead character and a youthful ‘chiropter’ who at first is stigmatized for his physical differences from the other members of his clan, then respected as a more

evolved form of the arboreal gliders. In a poignant conversation with his sister, Dusk asks, “Is different wrong?” and much of the storyline revolves around this theme.

Excerpt:

The tree had never seemed so high.

Dusk laboured up the trunk of the giant sequoia, sinking his claws into the soft, reddish bark. Pale lichen grew along the ridges; here and there, pitch glistened dully in the furrows. Warmed by the dawn’s heat, the tree steamed, releasing its heady fragrance. All around Dusk, insects sparkled and whirred, but he wasn’t interested in them just now.

His father, Icaron, climbed beside him and, though old, moved more swiftly than his son. Dusk hurried to keep up. He’d been born with only two claws on each hand instead of three, and hauling himself up the trunk was hard work.

“Will my other claws ever grow in?” he asked his father.

“They may.”

“If they don’t?”

“You’ll have less to grip and pull with,” Icaron said. “But you have unusually strong chest and shoulder muscles.”

Dusk said nothing, pleased.

“That will help make up for your weak legs,” his father added matter-of-factly.

Description: Intermediate fantasy; includes universal themes of belonging and self-discovery as well as an exploration of being different.

Read-ons: Good connecting books include: Monica Hughes's (1984) fantasy *The Guardian of Isis* in which the gifted Jody is as much of an outcast from his community as Darkwing is from his; Lois Lowry's (2000) *Gathering Blue*, about a futuristic society that discards people with physical disabilities; Virginia Frances Schwartz's (2003) *Initiation*, a story of self-discovery set on the West Coast of North America during the fifteenth century; Sara Winthrow's (1998) *Bat Summer*, the story of Lucy, a girl who walks the line between reality and fantasy to save herself from a traumatic memory; and Patricia C. Wrede's (2009) look at exceptionality through the steampunk genre of *Thirteenth Child*.

Porter, P. (2005). *The crazy man*. Toronto: Groundwood Books.

The setting of this verse novel is rural Saskatchewan, 1965, where the shadow of the local mental hospital looms large on the landscape. The story is told from the first-person viewpoint of 11 year old Emaline following the farm accident that left her leg seriously injured, her dog dead, and her father gone--blaming himself for her tragedy. Her mother hires Angus, a previous resident of the mental hospital, as a farm hand, and both Emaline and Angus are the recipients of stereotypical remarks from neighbours. To many in the surrounding community, they seem reduced to "Hopalong" and "Subhuman". The friendship between Em and Angus transcends difference and offers each the power to shape their identity in ways beyond the physical.

Excerpt:

*I pushed through the heavy doors
and out into the sun, blinked back
the light.*

Glanced down at my leg.

*It was just a little shriveled-up stick
compared to my other leg. Looked like
somebody'd marked all over it with a fat
red pen.*

*My shoe that I was so happy about
felt heavy and clunky. And just like that,
I felt ugly.*

Description: Intermediate historical fiction verse novel, winner of a Governor General's Award for Children's Fiction (text); themes include friendship, dealing with loss, and acceptance of diversity.

Read-ons: Kristin Butcher's (2001) *The Gramma War*, Glen Huser's (2006) *Skinnybones and the Wrinkle Queen*, Beverley Brenna's (2007) *The Moon Children*, and William Bell's (2003) *Alma* make good companion reads as they deal with changing family dynamics as well as deepening friendships at first unlikely to succeed. Karen Hesse's (1997) Newbery Award winning *Out of the Dust*, with its similar style and setting, Cora Taylor's (1985) *Julie* with its farm setting as well as a protagonist who must learn to deal with her own gifts and

challenges, and Sharon Creech's (2001) *Love That Dog*—another verse novel—are three other connected titles.

Roorda, J. (2007). *Wings of a bee*. Toronto: Sumach Press.

This is the tender story of a young girl whose sister eventually dies from an illness complicated by her cerebral palsy. Bronwyn experiences typical sibling rivalries with Carey, and is sometimes jealous of the attention Carey receives because of her disability, but there are also many happy times that, related in the warm, sure voice of reminiscence, make this title a positive yet realistic depiction of family life. The title refers to Bronwyn's belief that her sister has many hidden depths including the ability to read complex texts and write plays, even if her school and community don't believe she can, just as the wings of a bee are invisible to the naked eye. Roorda herself grew up alongside a younger brother with cerebral palsy and includes here a compelling description of a time before inclusion was commonly practiced in communities.

Excerpt:

At first I felt indignation. I looked at Carey, who was watching us. It was true, her limbs were as thin as skin and bones. It was on the tip of my tongue to tell Alannah that she was stupid, that Carey was thin because she had cerebral palsy, when something else occurred to me. Wouldn't it be interesting if I was related to someone who was perhaps part alien? Carey did possess some remarkable qualities.

"She can spell, you know," I said. "She could already last year when she was only four. And do you know what? No one ever taught her how.

She just knew." It hadn't occurred to me to claim bragging rights to Carey's achievements before. I had finally uncovered a way to draw some of that fanfare and prestige to myself, by sheer proximity.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include family relationships, living with diversity, loss, and coming-of-age.

Read-ons: Other titles that involve sibling rivalry and loss include Don Aker's (2007) *The Space Between* and Marthe Jocelyn's (2008) *Would You*. Books exploring issues regarding school inclusion for students with disabilities include Heidi Janz's (2004) *Sparrows on Wheels* as well as Christina Minaki's (2007) book for a younger audience: *Zoe's Extraordinary Holiday Adventures*. Jean Little's (1987) autobiographical *Little By Little: A Writer's Education* explores another childhood where disability is negotiated alongside dreams of becoming a writer. Other books for young people that involve a protagonist's consideration of faith include Judy Blume's (1970) *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and Anita Horrock's (2006) *Amost Eden*. Titles mentioned in *Wings of a Bee* include: the Bible; Laura Ingalls Wilder's 1937 and 1939 titles *On the Banks of Plum Creek* and *On the Shores of Silver Lake*; E. B. White's (1939) *Charlotte's Web*, and C. S. Lewis's "The Chronicles of Narnia" series beginning with the 1950 title *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Shaw, L. (2009). *Thinandbeautiful.com*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

This fictional account of a high school girl's struggle with an eating disorder is told in diary format. Flashbacks in different font allow a richer perspective on Maddie's past as well as her present. Maddie will not

admit she is sick, and it isn't until she spends time in a rehabilitation clinic that she begins to acknowledge reality and start the process of healing.

One of the threads in the story occurs through emails between Maddie and her online friends via a pro anorexia website. This site supports Maddie's illness through conversations with people who normalize her behaviour; however the eventual death of a friend from this site becomes an important catalyst for change.

Excerpt:

I had to admit that I wasn't as fat as I used to be, but I wasn't anywhere close to skinny. I had so much more work to do before I deserved my online name for real. I couldn't understand what everyone was talking about. My mom, my dad, Annie, the teacher, the doctor, and now Suzanne—everyone talking about my weight, and everyone lying about it, or totally blind to the reality. It was like they were having some sort of mass hallucination, where they had all decided that I had some sort of problem, so they had to make themselves see me as too thin. Crazy, all of them.

I was the only one who could see my reflection clearly and it still covered far too much of the mirror for me to really believe that I could leave my shadows behind.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction that is issues-based; themes include self-acceptance and self-discovery as well as friendships.

Read-ons: Cecily von Ziegesar's (2002) *Gossip Girl* could be a stepping

stone into this more realistic title. A book narrated with a similar issues-based slant is Terry Spencer Hesser's (1998) *Kissing Doorknobs*, a fictional, first person account of growing up with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Marsha Skrypuch's (2003) *The Hunger*, Diane Tullson's (2006) *Zero*, Lesley Fairfield's (2009) *Tyranny*, Marnelle Tokio's (2003) *More Than You Can Chew*, and K. C. Dyer's (2007) *Ms Zephyr's Notebook* are other titles that include characters with eating disorders. Teresa Toten's (2001) *The Game* also explores the story a teen who is surfacing for help in a residential psychiatric treatment centre.

Skrypuch, M. *The hunger*.

Paula is a contemporary 15 year old girl who is struggling with an eating disorder. As her body becomes ravaged, she metamorphoses into Marta, an orphaned teen living during the 1915 Armenian genocide. The equating of Paula's rejection of food with Marta's enforced starvation gives Paula the strength to battle her illness at Homewood, a treatment program. As Paula tries to research the events in her 'dream,' her grandmother admits her own Armenian roots.

Excerpt:

"That cake and nog probably contained six hundred calories minimum," considered Paula. "It takes running up and down once to burn ten calories. . . so I'll have to run up and down these steps sixty times."

Paula raced up one side of the steps and ran down the other again and again. She could feel her heart beating, and she became light-headed. That probably came from the days of enforced rest at the hospital, she

rationalized. Ignoring her fluttering heart, she continued her frenzied pace. All at once she became unutterably tired. Her breath became so laboured that it was like trying to breathe under water. She stumbled to a sitting position on the bottom step and held her head in her hands.

She began to feel a tingling in her left hand and all the way up her arm. She shook her hand to try to get the numbness to go away, but it had no effect. She was aware of a sharp pain in her chest. Where her breathing was once laboured, it was now impossible. Paula was gripped with fear. What had she done to herself?

Description: Young adult historical fiction told through the lens of fantasy and contemporary realism; themes include man’s inhumanity to man and the struggle to survive as well as issues related to perfectionism and self-acceptance.

Read-ons: Other novels that explore genocide include *Nobody’s Child*—Marsha Skrypuch’s (2003) sequel to *The Hunger*—and Eric Walters’ (2006) *Shattered*. Books that deal with eating disorders include Liane Shaw’s (2009) *thinandbeautiful.com*, Diane Tullson’s (2006) *Zero*, Lesley Fairfield’s (2009) *Tyranny*, *Ms Zephyr’s Notebook* by K. C. Dyer (2007), and Marnelle Tokio’s (2003) *More Than You Can Chew*. Books where protagonists time slip and become historical characters include K.C. Dyer’s “Eagle Glen” series beginning with the 2002 title *Seeds of Time*, Lynne Kositsky’s (2000) *A Question of Will*, Judith Silverthorne’s (2005) *The Secret of the Stone House*, Lois Donovan’s (2007) *Winds of L’Acadie*, and Lynne Fairbridge’s (1999) *Tangled in Time*, as

well as Nicholas Maes' (2009) combination of futuristic science fiction and time travel in *Laughing Wolf*. Characters in Darren Krill's (2006) *The Uncle Duncle Chronicles: Escape from Treasure Island* move into a fictional past. One other connecting fantasy is Barbara Nickel's (2006) *Hannah Waters and the Daughter of Johann Sebastian Bach*.

Stevenson, R. (2008). *Big guy*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

This coming-of-age story is told in the first-person voice of 17 year old Ethan, chatting online to Derek, a new found love interest, but afraid to reveal his true, overweight self. Ethan, a high school dropout, worries about a lot of things, including his single father's reaction to a gay son. A job as a physical care assistant offers Ethan a chance at mutual friendship with Aaliyah, a woman who has been a paraplegic since she experienced a brain aneurism. The two have more in common than they at first realize, and eventually push each other towards 'seizing the day' and following their dreams.

Excerpt:

She bangs her fist awkwardly on the arm of her chair. "Don't be a coward."

"Excuse me," I say. "I don't think you get to call me a coward. Not after you just dumped your boyfriend for the same reason."

Her eyes are daggers. "It's not the same," she says, spitting the words out.

“Your body’s not perfect. Neither is mine. So what’s the difference? If I’m a coward, so are you.”

“You don’t understand anything,” she says.

Impulsively, I put my hand on her arm. “Maybe I understand more than you think.”

Aaliyah stares at me for a long minute, and I can see her dark eyes starting to shine with tears. She blinks them away and puts her hand over mine.

“Maybe you do,” she says, so softly that I have to lean close to hear her. “Maybe we’re both cowards.”

Description: Young adult realistic fiction with a grade 3.5 reading level consistent with the Orca Soundings label; themes include self-acceptance and prejudice.

Read-ons: Kristyn Dunnion’s (2005) *Mosh Pit* is an even edgier read that explores the journey of a lesbian teen involved in the punk scene. *Skim*, a graphic novel by Mariko Tamaki and illustrated by Jillian Tamaki (2008), explores the life of a “not-slim” wannabe wiccan goth high school student who falls for a female teacher. Lesley Fairfield’s (2009) *Tyranny* and Francis Chalifour’s (2008) *Call Me Mimi* also deal with issues of weight and self-acceptance.

Tokio, M. *More than you can chew*. Tundra Books.

Marty has survived an alcoholic mother, an absent father, and a break with a boyfriend she thinks she loves, but the death of a younger

friend named Lily who has been with her at the treatment centre sends her reeling into an attempted suicide.

Excerpt:

Start eating, girls," Nurse Brown says. The smiles fade.

Nurse Brown sits down at the other end. She clasps her fingers tightly in a church and steeple formation. And then tries to hide her religion under the table. She doesn't want me to see the white anger of her knuckles. She stares at me across the sea of food.

"What happens if I don't go get my tray?"

"We strongly encourage you to eat norm... solid food."

"And if I don't solidify?"

"You can consume your daily caloric prescription in liquid form."

"And what's my magic daily number?"

"Five thousand calories."

Description: Semi-autobiographical young adult fiction; this is an issues book whose themes include family dynamics, power and control, and teen sexuality.

Read-ons: Other books about characters reclaiming power over their lives include Beth Goobie's (1997) *The Good, the Bad and the Suicidal* and Brian Doyle's (2003) *Boy O' Boy*.

Trembath, D. (1996). *The Tuesday café*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

Harper Winslow is a high school kid who's trying to get attention from his emotionally distant parents; when he's caught and charged for

lighting fires at school, the judge orders him to write an essay on how he's going to turn his life around. The problem is, he doesn't know...until The Tuesday Café—a writing class in which his mother's enrolled him—becomes an unexpected source of support.

Excerpt:

She filled me in on everyone. Patty had Down's Syndrome. Debra, Susan, and Billy, were, to varying degrees, "intellectually challenged."

"That is the term they use today," said Del. "So I've been told, anyway. So I'm going to use it. You don't want to insult anyone."

"That's for sure," I said, for lack of anything better.

Lou, she added, calling him, "The shaggy one over there with the gray hair," dropped out of school in grade four and never went back.

"Grade four?" I said. I could not believe that anyone would drop out of school in grade four.

"It was different in those days. All the grades were in the same room. The teacher talked to everyone the same. If she didn't like you, she could make it awfully uncomfortable for you. Lou there didn't get along with too many people."

Description: Realistic young adult fiction; themes include family relationships, self-discovery, and personal writing development.

Read-ons: Similar family dynamics are presented in Lesley Choyce's (2004) young adult title *Smoke and Mirrors*. *Shattered* by Eric Walters (2006) is another story of a teen learning about himself and others through experiencing a

local community, in this case, a soup kitchen. Heidi Janz's (2004) *Sparrows on Wheels* narrates the story of another teen intent on becoming a writer.

Tullson, D. (2006). *Zero*. Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Kas is attending a school for the arts, hoping to perfect her painting ability. When she begins to suffer from anorexia and bulimia, she tells no one, and since no one recognizes the signs, she becomes very ill until at last her secret is out. Even her new boyfriend, Jason, isn't strong enough to help her, and Kas is filled with self-loathing when her parents take her back home for treatment.

Excerpt:

Outside the drugstore, Kas jumps in place, watching her reflection in the store window.

Fat. Fat. Fat.

Shouldn't have eaten. Ate at breakfast, again at lunch. Too much.

Disgusting and fat.

She pushes the door open. Hair color. Toothpaste. Toilet paper. Kas roves the aisles. Painkillers. Hair removers.

She calls to the pharmacist behind the counter. "Where are the laxatives?"

Another customer, a gray-haired woman, stops and stares.

"Not the fiber kind. I need something that works fast."

The pharmacist comes out from behind the counter. She points Kas to a display of laxatives. "Are you feeling all right?"

*Kas snatches a pack of laxatives from the display. "Yes. Of course."
She laughs loudly. "Oh, you thought they were for me. No, they're for my
mother. She's in the worst discomfort."*

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include self-acceptance as well as issues related to eating disorders.

Read-ons: Kas' critical internal voice can be contrasted with the self-perception Anubis has learned from her social context in Deborah Ellis's (2006) *Jackal in the Garden*. *Hope's War* by Marsha Skrypuch (2001) relates a different dilemma for a gifted teen attending a school for the arts. Other books about eating disorders include Marsha Skrypuch's (1999) *The Hunger*, Lesley Fairfield's (2009) *Tyranny*, K. C. Dyer's (2007) *Ms Zephyr's Notebook*, Liane Shaw's (2009) *thinandbeautiful.com*, and Marnelle Tokio's (2003) *More Than You Can Chew*.

Waldorf, H. (2008). *Tripping*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press.

A group of six teenagers signs on for a cross-Canada summer field trip, each attempting to exorcise personal demons. Rainey—who turns 17 en route—is concerned about her future and about her past as well; the mother she never knew is suddenly available for contact, and during this trip Rainey must decide whether or not to go and see her. A relationship with Alain, one of the boys in the group, suddenly turns serious, and Rainey doesn't want it to be a temporary fling. One aspect of Rainey's characterization involves the use of a prosthetic leg due to the 'amniotic

band syndrome' she was born with. It is her employment of the 'Flexileg,' in a variety of situations, that confirms her true zest for life.

Excerpt:

Not to be deterred, Drunk-guy slid down beside where Alain and I were perched side-by-side on a log. There were some who might say we were holding hands—but I didn't think thumb-wrestling counted.

"Nice legs, baby," Drunk-guy said to me, running a grubby hand over my knee. His hot breath smelled like beer and onions.

"Here," I said, bending down quickly, popping off my Flexileg, and pulling it out from where it was hidden underneath my pant leg. I offered it up to him.

"Take one home with you."

Drunk-guy bolted off the log so fast he lost his balance and almost fell into the fire. Screaming, he scrambled up and ran off down the road and into the night like he'd seen a ghost.

I laughed so hard I fell backwards off the log, taking Alain down with me.

Description: Young adult realistic fiction; themes include coming-of-age, teen sexuality, and mother/daughter relationships.

Read-ons: Other titles that explore coming-of-age and teen sexuality include Beth Goobie's (2006) *Hello Groin* and Susan Juby's (2004) *Miss Smithers* as well as Don Aker's (2007) *The Space Between*. Julie Johnston's

(2001) *In Spite of Killer Bees* further examines a daughter's reunion with a long absent mother.

Walters, E. (2005). *Elixir*. Toronto: Penguin Books.

The setting of this historical fiction novel is the Institute of Biological Research, University of Toronto, in the summer of 1921. The story traces events regarding Banting and Best's discovery of insulin, through the first-person narration of Ruthie, a fictional 12 year old girl who spends time at the Institute while her mother works there as a cleaning lady. Ruthie pities the experimental dogs, and joins demonstrators in hatching a plan for their release; a chance meeting with Emma, a young girl with diabetes, offers Ruthie another perspective and then Ruthie has a decision to make. While Emma's character is a minor one, she has a powerful and heroic role to play within the context of this book and her cameo is evocative of a time and place before the treatment of diabetes.

Excerpt:

"I was a normal thirteen-year-old girl until the diabetes struck."

"You're thirteen?" I'd guessed her to be younger than I.

"I'm fifteen," she said. "How old did you think I was?"

"I don't know," I muttered. I really didn't want to say.

"I think I look around ten. There are times I look at myself in the mirror and I can't believe the face staring back at me. And look at my hair!"

I wasn't sure what she meant by that. Her hair was long and brown and sort of...sort of frizzy looking.

"It's brittle and it falls out in clumps. It used to be so lovely," she said.

"And now..." She let the sentence trail off and shook her head sadly as she ran a hand through her hair.

"I look like a living, breathing, talking skeleton because I'm not allowed to eat. I'm following a special diet for diabetics. It's called under-nutrition therapy," Emma explained.

Description: Intermediate historical fiction; themes involve the ethics of science and animal rights.

Read-ons: Jerry Spinelli's (1997) *Wringer* and *Crow Medicine*, the second in the "Wildlife Rescue" series by Diane Haynes (2006), offer alternate perspectives on animal rights. Marsha Skrypuch's (1999) *The Hunger* offers two other perspectives on characters and weight loss.

Walters, E. (2000). *Rebound*. Toronto: Stoddart Kids.

Sean is a grade eight kid who is trying to rise above all the trouble he caused at school last year. His new friend, David, gives him some pointers about getting along with girls as well as basketball skills, and, in return, Sean learns to listen to David about his wheelchair use and his hopes of a complete recovery some day from the accident that paralyzed him.

Excerpt:

“If you can get that fade-away hook to drop consistently, it works in combination with your jump shot or a move to the hoop. They may have to double down on you, or at least get outside help, and that lets you rotate it back to the outside for a shot while you crash the boards for the rebound.”

I gave him a questioning look. “You know a lot about basketball.”

“Yeah. Why shouldn’t I?”

“Well...” Had I said something wrong again?

He shook his head

slowly. “I’m...in...a...wheelchair...I’m...not...stupid...or....

dumb,” he paused on each word. It reminded me of the way Mrs. Burk had spoken to him. Actually, a couple of the teachers talked to him that way, sort of slow, like he wouldn’t understand if they spoke normally.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction; themes include living with disability and making choices.

Read-ons: Don Trembath’s (2000) *Frog Face and the Three boys* is also about kids who are trying to make positive choices about behaviour. Diana Wiener’s (1986) *Last Chance Summer* is a good stepping stone into more literary reading, as it deals with similar issues through more indepth characterization. Beth Goobie’s (2002) *Kicked Out* offers another look at societal response to disability.

Walters, E. (2003). *Run*. Toronto: Penguin Books.

It's 1980, and Terry Fox is undertaking his selfless act of running across Canada after an amputation due to cancer. This fictionalized account of the Terry Fox story brings details to readers through the voice of 14 year old Winston MacDonald, its first-person narrator. Winston, a troubled teen, travels to Nova Scotia with his distant, journalist father, and spends time with Terry Fox and Doug Alward during the Marathon of Hope.

Excerpt:

"That was one godawful shot."

I spun around. It was Terry! He was wearing his track pants and a ratty old sweatshirt, and with his hair mussed up he looked like he'd just rolled out of bed.

"Do you normally shoot that badly?" he asked.

"No, of course not!" I protested. "It was the ball, and the net and—"

"Sounds like a lot of excuses. Go get it."

I ran over and picked the ball up again, shaking away the excess water.

"Pass," Terry said, holding up his hands in front of him.

I whipped over a chest pass and he caught it. He held the ball up in one hand and examined it closely. "You're right, this isn't much of a ball."

"That's what I said. If it was a good ball then—"

He put up a shot and it sailed right into the hoop, cutting me off in mid-excuse.

I grabbed the ball, and he held up his hands like he wanted me to pass again. Even in the dim light I couldn't help but see a smirk on his face. I passed him the ball. He lined up a shot and for the second time it dropped right in. I corralled the rebound and again he held out his hands.

"Pass."

Description: Intermediate historical fiction; themes include father-son relationships and the power of heroes.

Read-ons: Richard Scrimger's (1998) *The Nose from Jupiter* offers a zany look at a boy of a similar age, with parents strikingly similar to Winston's, solving life's problems in an alternative way. *Run, Billy, Run* by Matt Christopher (1980) is another title about a boy who uses running to improve his life, and Katherine Paterson's (1977) *Bridge to Terabithia* includes a character who takes pride in his speed and endurance and who uses running as a way to gain respect. *Rebound*, also by Eric Walters (2000), explores another perspective on physical disability. Titles that deal with imaginary friends include Lesley Choyce's (2004) *Smoke and Mirrors*, and Deborah Ellis's (1999) *Looking for X*.

Walters, E. (2009). *Special Edward*. Victoria, BC: Orca Books.

Edward is looking for a way to improve his high school grades without working, and he thinks a special education label might be the answer. The results are surprising in that not only does he achieve this goal, he discovers that he actually does have some special learning needs, after all, that he has been hiding from his parents and teachers as well as from himself.

Excerpt:

I'd been doing a lot of reading, trying to decide what special-education thing I was going to become. I'd read about hyperactivity. This was something I could easily do—at least to start.

There were, in fact, thousands of exceptionalities. I figured the safest thing to do was have a whole bunch of them. It was the shotgun approach to special education.

Description: Intermediate realistic fiction with a grade 3.5 reading level consistent of the Orca Soundings imprint; themes include acceptance of diversity.

Read-ons: Valerie Sherrard's (2007) *Speechless* provides another perspective on high-school identity with a protagonist who attempts to escape an oratory assignment through a 'protest of silence' that eventually helps him find his true voice. René Schmidt's (2008) *Leaving Fletchville* portrays a main character with similarly disruptive characteristics at school who also changes his behaviour through the course of the novel.

APPENDIX F

References to the Annotated Bibliography

**Titles in bold are the Canadian novels in the study sample

**Titles in regular print are books exclusively identified in the Read-ons; these may be novels, non-fiction, short stories, or poetry books and while work by Canadian authors and publishers is foregrounded, the list of titles in regular print is not entirely Canadian.

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