

From *Spaceman* to *The ADDED Touch*: Using Juvenile Literature to Teach about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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Abstract

Books can be used to teach others about disabling conditions. We located 29 children and adolescent fiction books that portray a human character with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In this article we present an overview of these books and describe how teachers can use them to teach their students about ADHD. Additionally we provide examples of activities that may be used to teach about ADHD.

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Professionals suggest that juvenile literature can be used to teach students about disabilities (e.g., Blaska, 2003) and/or be used as bibliotherapy (e.g., Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000). Although limited data exists, some evidence indicates that literature can help facilitate changes in attitudes and/or knowledge about individuals with disabilities (Marlowe, Maycock, Palmer, & Morrison, 1997; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1996), particularly when coupled with direct contact with persons with disabilities (Favazza & Odom, 1997; Fernandez & Jenkins, 1999).

Annotated bibliographies or lists of suggested books that depict disabilities may be found in the professional literature, in pamphlets disseminated by public libraries, or on various websites. Most lists categorize books by disability. Several authors have also analyzed the accuracy of portrayals and identified themes in these books. For example, the following annotated bibliographies and studies have examined portrayals of developmental disabilities (Dyches & Prater, 2000; Orr et al., 1997), autism (Dyches, Prater, & Cramer, 2001), learning disabilities (Prater, 2003), mental retardation (Dyches et al., 2001; Prater, 1999), and visual impairment (Carroll & Rosenblum, 2000). Only one comprehensive list of juvenile books portraying ADHD was located in the literature (Demetrulias, 2000).

The purpose of this article is three fold. First, given the increased emphasis on ADHD in recent years, we updated the Demetrulias (2000) list focusing only on human fictionalized accounts of ADHD. Second, we analyzed the characterizations and looked for themes common across stories. Third, we discuss ideas for using

these books in the general education classroom to help teach students about disabilities.

Books Located and Analyzed

Using a comprehensive search procedure, Demetrulias (2000) located 21 fiction and nonfiction books written for children or adolescents depicting characters with ADHD. In order to update this list, we searched seven reference books that provide annotated bibliographies of children's literature portraying disabilities. Only two of these books listed fictional characterizations of ADHD (Blaska, 2003; Sweeney, 1998). We also conducted a computerized database search of professional journal articles and located two articles addressing ADHD and juvenile literature specifically (Fouse et al., 1997; Demetrulias, 2000). Additional internet bookstores (Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Special Needs) and the Library of Congress's catalog were also searched. One printed list published by the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (no date) was also examined. This resulted in a list of 41 books.

Two of the three authors read each book. We then excluded books that did not address ADHD explicitly, although they may have described characteristics common in children with ADHD (e.g., *Sit Still, No, David!*). We also excluded non-fiction books and books that portrayed ADHD in the form of an animal (e.g., *Eukee the Jumpy, Jumpy Elephant; Shelley, the Hyperactive Turtle*) or inanimate object (e.g., *Otto Learns about His Medicine*). Thus, books were included on our list if they were written for children or adolescents in story format, included a

major or supporting human character who had ADHD, and explicitly referred to the condition as ADD or ADHD. This resulted in 29 books (see Table 1). Demetrualis (2000) found 21 books using broader inclusion criteria. Only 10 of the books appearing on the Demetrualis list met our criteria.

While reading the books, we took notes regarding the manner in which ADHD was portrayed and the related issues discussed. We then met and discussed our results. Themes emerged throughout our discussion. A brief summary of these themes follows.

Table 1. *Children and Young Adult Books that Portray Attention Deficit Disorder with [Approximate Reading Grade Level]*

Picture Books

- *A.D.D. not B.A.D.* by Audrey Penn (Monica Dunsky Wyrick, illustrator), Child and Family Press, 2003 [6th].*
- *The ADDED Touch* by Robyn Watson (Susanne Nuccio, illustrator), Silver Star, 2000 [2nd].*
- *The Don't-Give-Up-Kid* by Jeanne Gehret (Sandra Ann DePauw, illustrator), Verbal Images, 1996 [6th].
- *Eagle Eyes* by Jeanne Gehret (Susan Covert, illustrator). Verbal Images, 1990 [3rd].
- *Waiting for Mr. Goose* by Laurie Lears (Karen Ritz, illustrator), Whitman, 1999 [4th].*

Chapter Books

- *Cory Stories* by Jeanne Kraus (Whitney Martin, Illustrator), Magination, 2005 [3rd].
- *Eddie Enough!* by Debbie Zimmett, Woodbine House, 2001 [4th].
- *Falling in Love is No Snap* by June Foley, Dell, 1986 [6th].
- *First Star I See* by Jaye Andras Caffrey, Verbal Images, 1997 [6th].*
- *Hyper Harry* by Patricia H. Aust, New Concepts, 2001 [5th].*
- *I'm Somebody Too* by Jeanne Gehret, Verbal Images, 1992 [5th].
- *Joey Pigza Loses Control* by Jack Gantos, Harper Collins, 2000 [6th].*
- *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* by Jack Gantos, Harper Collins, 1998 [6th].*
- *Jumpin' Johnny Get Back to Work!* by Michael Gordon (Janet H. Junco, illustrator), GSI, 1991 [7th].
- *Lost in the Forest!* By Nathan Aaseng, Aigsburg, 1996 [4th].*
- *Making the Grade: An Adolescent's Struggle with Attention Deficit Disorder* by Roberta N. Parker, Specialty, 1992 [6th].
- *My Brother's a World-Class Pain* by Michael Gordon (Janet H. Junco, illustrator), GSI, 1992 [6th].
- *Parents Wanted* by George Harrar (Dan Murphy, illustrator), Milkweed Editions, 2001 [6th].*
- *Pay Attention, Slosh!* by Mark Smith, Whitman, 1997 [4th].
- *Phoebe's Best Best Friend* by Barbara A. Roberts, Advantage, 2000 [6th].
- *Ricky and the Hammond Cousins* by Wanda M. Yoder, Christian Light, 1996 [6th].
- *Slam Dunk* by Roberta N. Parker (Richard A. DiMatteo), Impact, 1993 [6th].
- *Sometimes I Drive My Mom Crazy, But I Know She's Crazy about Me* by Lawrence E. Shapiro (Timothy Parrotte, illustrator), Center for Applied Psychology, 1995 [4th].
- *Spaceman* by Jane Cutler, Puffin, 1997 [6th].
- *Sparky's Excellent Misadventure* by Phyllis Carpenter and Marti Ford (Peter Horius, illustrator), Magination, 2000 [3rd].
- *Trout and Me* by Susan Shreve, Knopf, 2002 [3rd].*
- *What Do You Mean I Have Attention Deficit Disorder?* by Kathleen M. Dwyer, 1996 [4th].
- *What Would Joey Do?* by Jack Gantos, HarperCollins, 2003 [6th].*
- *Zipper, the Kid with ADHD* by Caroline Janover (Rick Powell, illustrator), Woodbine House, 1997 [6th].*

Key: *Books we recommend based on literary and illustrative (if appropriate) qualities.

Picture Books

Of the 29 fiction books located, only five were picture books. Picture books are usually written at a level which young children can understand, but not yet read. They generally have large pictures with fewer words. Although picture books are usually read aloud to young children, they can also be used effectively with older audiences.

Most of the picture books discussed diagnosing ADHD. For example, in *The ADDED Touch*, Matthew has trouble concentrating. His mother takes him to a doctor who indicates that he may have a “chemical imbalance in his head” and diagnoses him as having ADD. Other picture books described situations in which children with ADHD show they can overcome their behavioral tendencies. Stephen in *Waiting for Mr. Goose* is constantly told to slow down, sit still, or pay attention. One day he notices a goose whose leg is clamped to a small metal trap. Stephen is determined to catch the goose so the trap can be removed, but each time he gets close, the goose attempts to fly away. Showing stillness, patience and determination, Stephen slowly draws the goose closer to him until he can catch him to remove the trap.

Chapter Books

In addition to the five picture books, we discovered 24 chapter books that portray ADHD. Chapter books are longer than picture books with few to no illustrations. They are usually read independently, but may also be read aloud to students. Although all of the chapter books are fictional accounts, some focus primarily on ADHD, while others include a character with ADHD, but the story plot doesn't center on the disorder. For example, in *Making the Grade* and *I'm Somebody Too*, the reader experiences what it like to

have ADHD or to have a sibling with ADHD. That is the essence of the plot. In contrast, other books, like the *Joey Pigza* series, tell about the adventures of Joey, but not necessarily with the intent of the reader vicariously experiencing what it's like to have ADHD. When compared with previous analyses of other disability portrayals in children's literature, more books portraying ADHD centered the plot around diagnosing or living with ADHD than other disabilities such as developmental disabilities (Dyches & Prater, 2000), autism (Dyches et al., 2001), learning disabilities (Prater, 2003), or mental retardation (Dyches et al., 2001; Prater, 1999).

The chapter books address issues such as being diagnosed with ADHD (e.g., *Zipper the Kid with ADHD*) and starting and/or stopping medication (e.g., *Joey Pigza Swallows the Key*). Some also describe other interventions such as attention strategies (e.g., *Eagle Eyes*). Using the three behavioral areas for diagnosing ADHD, we found books that characterize hyperactivity (e.g., *A.D.D. not B.A.D.*), impulsiveness (e.g., *Trout and Me*), and distractibility (e.g., *First Start I See*). Most of the characters in these books, however, exhibit behaviors in all three areas (e.g., *Eddie Enough! Lost in the Forest, Parents Wanted*).

Most of the books demonstrate what school is like for students with ADHD. Sometimes schooling is portrayed positively and sometimes negatively. In *Spaceman*, for example, Gary's fifth grade teacher returns an envelope of papers.

On the top of every single test and every single paper, Mr. Rudolph had drawn a picture of a sad face and had written “F” and “Try harder!” with his red pen. Gary had gotten an F on everything he'd done

so far in the fifth grade. And he did not know how to try any harder. (Cutler, 1997, p. 6-7)

Once Gary receives the kind of education services that meet his needs, he has a positive experience in school.

Not all teachers are portrayed negatively. In *Zipper, the Kid with ADHD*, Zach submits a report on Indians that got mixed in with his peanut butter sandwich in his book bag. Much to Zach's disappointment, his teacher, Mrs. Ginsberg, gives him an incomplete. Recognizing Zach's need for accommodations, however, Mrs. Ginsberg allows him to recopy the report and resubmit it. Later in the story Zach earns from Mrs. Ginsberg an A+ on science report on electricity.

One unique book is written in the format of a boy with ADHD writing his journal (*Sparky's Excellent Misadventures*). Even though the words are printed rather than typed, Sparky's grammar, spelling and punctuation is impeccable. Sparky describes many mishaps in his life. He seems to get in trouble wherever he goes until he starts taking "the little pill" and then life runs more smoothly, although not perfectly for him.

As with juvenile literature in general, we found books that portray ADHD to cross a spectrum of well written to mediocre literature. One book, *Joey Pigza Loses Control*, received the prestigious Newbery Honor Book award in 2001. Another book, *Hyper Harry*, was honored with the EPPIE award (outstanding achievement in e-publishing) in the category of children's book in 2003. In Table 1 we indicate which books we recommend based on literary and illustrative (if appropriate) qualities.

Using Books to Teach About ADHD

Most children learn about differences

among people through observation. When it comes to disabilities they notice, for example, the young girl in a wheelchair or the boy wearing a helmet and walking with an unusual gait. "Invisible" disabilities like ADHD, however, can be much more difficult to understand. In fact,

Common Myths about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Many people believe myths about ADHD (Montague & Warger, 1997). Even parents and teachers who have experiences with individuals with ADHD have common misunderstandings (Pancheri & Prater, 1999). Most of these myths have been perpetuated by the media or promoted by some professionals and are difficult to change, even when there is evidence to the contrary. For example, the general population, and even many teachers continue to believe that sugar and other food additives cause hyperactivity (Sciutto, Terjesen, & Frank, 2000), even when research demonstrates this is not true (Pescarra-Kovach & Alexander, 1994). Another myth is that all children with ADHD benefit from the same intervention (DuPaul & Eckert, 1997). Not all students have the same type of ADHD, however. Some experience hyperactivity while others might be under-active. Some have major attention difficulties while others are mildly inattentive but overly impulsive. Still others have significant problems with hyperactivity, attention, and impulsivity (Fowler, 2002). Given the different characteristics of ADHD, one type of intervention does not work for all. Most children respond to a combination of behavior management, self-regulation training, medication and special education service. Many people believe ADHD has been over diagnosed and medication over prescribed for this condition (e.g., Novak & Bower, 2001). Others question even the existence of ADHD as a condition (e.g., Kohn, 1998). There is, however, little evidence of widespread over diagnosis or over medicated children (Goldman, Genel, Bezman, & Slanetz, 1998). And there is general agreement among educational and medical professionals that ADHD does exist as a condition (Dodson, 2002).

many myths surround ADHD (see *Common Myths* Sidebar).

Teachers can help students develop three levels of comprehension about ADHD: awareness, understanding and acceptance (Dyches & Prater, 2000). The first level, awareness, involves knowing that differences exist and recognizing those differences when presented with examples. When children reach the second level, understanding, they develop appreciation and sensitivity to the struggles individuals with ADHD might experience. The third level is acceptance of those with differences and is genuinely

characterized by accepting individuals with ADHD as any other child.

Teachers can enhance awareness, understanding, and acceptance of individuals with disabilities through books and other activities in the classroom. Books can help students relate to characteristics of ADHD and the impact such characteristics have on school and home life. Prior to using books to teach about disabilities teachers should, however, consider the questions posed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Questions to Consider Before Using Juvenile Literature to Teach about ADHD.*

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1. Have I read this book in advance to ensure its appropriateness for my students?
 2. Is there a student in my classroom who has been classified with ADHD, or anyone who other students would assume has the disability?
 3. If there is a student with ADHD in my classroom, is it better that the student be involved or not involved in the reading of the book?
 4. Do any of my students have siblings or other family members with ADHD?
 5. How will teaching this information impact my students and those who have ADHD?
 6. Do my students know how to share thoughts and comments in positive or non-offensive ways?
 7. Do I understand the strengths of individuals with ADHD to the degree that I can present the condition with a positive, strength-based attitude?
 8. Is my teaching objective to present the challenges of those with ADHD to others so that individuals with ADHD can be accepted and appreciated?
 9. Should the parents of any of the students in the class be contacted prior to discussing this topic?
 10. Are there any of the parents of my students who could be involved in the teaching of this subject?
-

When books are used to teach about disabilities, teachers can use discussion questions while (a) introducing the book, (b) reading the book, and/or (c) after reading the book (Prater, Dyches & Johnstun, in press). Below are some general discus-

sion questions to ask when using children's literature to teach about ADHD.

Before Reading:

- "Based on the title, what do you think the book will address?"
- "What do these pictures tell us about the story?"

- (After reading a selected passage) “Now what do you think this book is about?”
- “Have you ever known someone who has trouble (sitting still, remembering to go to their baseball game...)? (Character’s name) has trouble doing that as well. Let’s find out what happens to him/her.”

While Reading:

- “What do you think is going to happen next in the story?”
- “How do you think (character’s name) feels at this point in the story?”
- “How would you feel if you were (character’s name)?”
- “Has this ever happened to you or someone you know?”
- “What would you do if you saw a person behaving like (character’s name)?”

After Reading:

- “Did (character’s name) change throughout the story? If so, how and why?”
- “What did you learn from this story?”
- “Are you or someone you know like (character’s name)?”
- “In what way are you alike and in what ways are you different from (character’s name)?”

Questions such as these can be used in class-wide oral discussions or students can individually respond to questions in written journals.

A few of the books we selected border on being non-fiction (e.g., *Cory Stories*; *Sometimes I Drive My Mom Crazy, But I Know She’s Crazy about Me*), but remained on our list because the author uses a story format. Some of the books include information about ADHD in a question/answer format at the end of the book (e.g., *Making the Grade*; *Slam Dunk*; *Zipper, the Kid with ADHD*). Other books include resources for parents (e.g., *The Don’t-Give-Up Kid*, *Eagle Eyes*). This supplemental material can be helpful in sharing additional information and answering students’ questions. Answers to these types of questions are provided:

- What is ADHD?
- What causes ADHD?
- How do I know if I have ADHD?
- How does medication help people with ADHD?
- How can I develop better study skills?
- Where can I get more information about ADHD?

Including Activities in Teaching about ADHD

In addition to using discussion questions, simulated activities in the classroom can help students become more aware, understanding, and accepting of individuals with ADHD. Activities may be most effective if implemented prior to reading the book so that the student can begin to develop greater understanding of the character in the story. Below are three suggested activities. Additional resources for using both books and activities to teach about disabilities may be found in Table 3.

Table 3. *Other Helpful Resources to Teach Disability Awareness.*

Books

- *Developmental Disability in Children's Literature* by Tina Taylor Dyches and Mary Anne Prater. Council for Exceptional Children, 2000.
- *Disability Awareness: A Guidebook for Families and Educators* (2nd ed.) by Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER) Center.
- *Disability Awareness in the Classroom: A Resource Tool for Teachers and Students* by Lorie Levison and Isabelle St. Onge. Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1999.
- *Kids with Special Needs: Information and Activities to Promote Awareness and Understanding* by Veronica Getskow and Dee Konczal. The Learning Works, 1996.

Teacher Materials

- *Count Me In*. PACER Center. <http://www.pacer.org>
 - *Friends Who Care*. National Easter Seals Society. <http://www.easterseals.com>
 - *Just Like Me and You*. Paraquad, Inc. <http://www.paraquad.org/disaware.htm>
-

Tell students they are going to be given a list of directions to follow only once and that they need to listen very carefully. Once all of the directions are given they are to follow them in order. Then provide a list of 10 unrelated directions, such as:

1. Find a pencil.
2. Take off your left shoe.
3. Stand up and walk around your desk.
4. Clap your hands 3 times.
5. Find your math book.
6. Shake hands with the person on your left.
7. Sit down.
8. Write your name on a piece of paper.
9. Turn to page 57 in your science book.
10. Put your head down on your desk.

After the activity discuss how it was difficult it was to do all 10 and in order primarily because there were more directions than they could remember at one time. Explain that students with attention problems sometimes feel this way when given even simple directions.

Provide students with a short reading passage and 1 of 3 different written directions. Ask one group to count how many letter s's there are in the passage. Ask another group to identify all of the verbs. Ask a third group to be prepared to answer questions related to the content of the passage. Allow the students a set amount of time (e.g., one minute) to complete the directions. Then remove all of the reading passages and directions from their desks and ask the students to answer these 3 questions:

1. How many s's were in the reading passage?
2. What verbs were used?
3. What was this reading passage about?

Discuss their frustration with not knowing the answers to the questions they weren't assigned. Explain how some students have difficulty with schoolwork because they naturally pay attention to the wrong things (e.g., counting s's) and consequently miss important information (e.g., reading comprehension questions).

Tell students they are going to be asked to move their bodies in a way they are not used to moving. Explain that everyone is to move in slow motion for 5 minutes. Everything they do is to be slower than normal. Afterwards discuss how difficult it was to hold back from doing things faster because that was more natural. Explain that some individuals' bodies need to move around a lot and to move as most people do is almost like being asked to do everything in slow motion.

Conclusion

Juvenile literature is one way in which teachers can introduce and teach students about themselves or others. Although reading books and participating in simulations can help teach about disabilities, research indicates these activities are more successful in changing attitudes and developing awareness, sensitivity and understanding if they are coupled with personal exposure to and positive experience with individuals with disabilities (Favazza & Odom, 1997; Fernandez & Jenkins, 1999). Simply reading a book about a person with a disability will most likely not change someone's attitude; superficial exposure to those with disabilities is also insufficient. Educators interested in teaching students about ADHD will be most successful if they model appropriate attitudes, as well as integrate appropriate literature, effective simulations, and positive experiences as part of their instruction. Further research, however, needs to be conducted to isolate the impact each has on teaching about those with disabilities. Until such research can be conducted we encourage teachers and teacher educators to use juvenile literature in teaching about disabilities. Similarly, we suggest parents and librarians seek out fictional portrayals of ADHD and include

these books in their home and library collections.

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