A study determined how economically deprived people were portrayed in selected works of children's literature. The content of 30 children's books of realistic fiction written by authors and illustrators of Newbery and Caldecott Award Winners and Honor Books was analyzed. Results indicated that: (1) nearly all economically deprived characters were described as attractive; (2) the books written by winners of Caldecott Award and Honor Books portrayed young black males as economically deprived at a significantly higher rate; (3) books written by winners of Newbery Award and Honor Books portrayed young white females as economically deprived at a slightly higher rate; and (4) more children than adults were portrayed as economically deprived in both Caldecott and Newbery books. (Twenty references, a list of the books selected, and 10 tables of data are attached.) (RS)
THE PORTRAYAL OF ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION IN THIRTY SELECTED WORKS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

Federal policy toward the poor has changed dramatically in the last 30 years. Chafel (1990) stated that in the 1960s the United States was ready to undertake bold initiatives in social policy and was optimistic that poverty could be reduced, if not eradicated. The 1980s witnessed a nation disillusioned with past efforts. This period was characterized by a preference for scaling back existing programs and a reluctance to embrace new social policy initiatives (Danziger, Haveman, & Plotnick, 1986). Where the 1960s spoke of "possibilities," the 1980s became aware of the necessity of "limits" (Harrington, 1984).

Today, with the onset of the 1990s, a multitude of American families live in impoverished circumstances. As of 1986, one out of five American children subsisted in poverty: 43.1 percent of Black children; 37.7 percent of Hispanic children; and 16.1 percent of White children (Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, 1988). From 1979 to 1986, the number of poor families with children rose dramatically: from 4.1 million to 5.5 million, an increase of 35 percent (Greenstein, 1988). According to Reed and Sautter (1990), by 1989 young children accounted for 39.5 percent of American's poor. The official U.S. poverty rate for all citizens in 1989
edged slightly downward to 13.1 percent - only a two percent decline from the Johnson era. Yet, in raw numbers, more Americans are poorer today than before the War on Poverty. Nearly forty million people of all ages live in families with income levels below the official poverty level of $7,704 for a family of two, $9,435 for a family of three, and $12,092 for a family of four. The current poverty rate is higher than it was during the worst recession years of the 1970s (Reed & Sautter, 1990 p. 3).

Roser, Hoffman, and Farest (1990) stated that all children, whether at risk, economically deprived or enriched, deserve to be immersed in the same kind of supportive environment at school that has served literacy growth in homes. School can break the cycle of failure and despair by developing instructional programs that incorporate the life experiences and skills that the student brings to the classroom and at the same time providing students with skills and strategies they will need to succeed in the larger society (Cazaden, 1986). This can be accomplished through alternative curricula. Alternative conceptions of curricula in reading, mathematics, and writing exist, and they have been used in classrooms that serve the children of poverty. According to Farr and Daniels (1986), promising new
curricula in reading share the following characteristics:

* they emphasize meaning (i.e., comprehending what is read) and employ the full range of cues (phonemic, contextual, and so on) as aids to "constructing" meaning;

* they place less emphasis on the teaching of discrete decoding skills in isolation from their use, as children move up through the grades;

* they expose children to a wide range of appropriate text, including children's literature; and

* they include reading material that reflects and respects the life experiences and background of the students (pp. 155-156).

Children's books are expensive commodities. Many families and schools cannot afford to purchase the number of books that they would prefer. Further, family purchase of books is increasingly a middle- and upper-class phenomenon. Thus, educators take on the responsibility of providing working-class and poor children experiences with culturally relevant, popular, and classic literature (Harris, 1991). Further, multicultural literature can provide models for problem solving, can inform children of another culture when
direct interaction is not possible, and can demonstrate to children the universal and specific cultural values, behaviors, institutions, and artifacts which exist (Harris, 1991).

Children cannot be easily defined. Nor can their literature. However, Paul Hazard (1963) eloquently describes children's literature:

I like books that remain faithful to the very essence of art. Namely: those that offer to children an intuitive and direct way of knowledge, a simply beauty capable of being perceived immediately, arousing in their souls a vibration which will endure...

And books that awaken in them not maudlin sentimentality but sensibility; that enable them to share in great human emotions; that give them respect for universal life---that of animals, of plants; that teach them not to despise everything that is mysterious in creation and in man...I like books of knowledge...when they have tact and moderation; when, instead of pouring out so much material on a child's soul that it is crushed, they plant in it a seed that will develop from the inside...I like them especially when they distill from all the different kinds of knowledge the most
difficult and the most necessary---that of the human heart (pp. 42-43).

Fenwick (1967) stated that literature can be a valuable tool in helping children cope with and master those problems of importance in their life—be it what to do on a rainy afternoon, how to play a new game, or how to manage anger at one's mother. For example, Sharon Bell Mathis's The Hundred Penny Box described Michael's sensitive, yet masterful management of his mother:

"Aunt Dew's like a child," his mother said quietly.
"She's like you...I's just getting rid of that big old ugly wooden box always under foot!"
Michael stood up. "No," he said..."I mean,..."Aunt Dew won't go to sleep if she doesn't see her box in the corner. Can I take it back and then you can let her see it? And when she goes to sleep, you can take it" (pp. 15-16).

Also, literature is a powerful medium through which young people can work out some of their conflicts and concerns and through which they can learn about solutions and alternatives for their particular dilemmas (Singer, 1977). Beverly Cleary's Ramona and Her Father introduced Ramona, a rambunctious second grader, in an unhappy family:
Ramona burst in through the back door...and announced hoarsely, "We did it!"...She waited for her family to share her triumph...
Instead her father said "Ramona, you know you are supposed to be home before dark." "Well!" thought Ramona. "Some family!"...To her wonder, no heavy feeling weighed her down, no tears. She simply stood there, cold, dripping, and feeling good....Her feelings were not hurt at all (p. 136).
Today's children's literature is dealing more and more with current issues. Social problems are now being handled openly in children's books. Such topics as death, divorce, old age, poverty, crime, drug abuse, mental illness, racism, and handicaps are becoming the subjects of novels for young children -nd, to some extent, of picture books for children. Rachel Isadora's book Ben's Trumpet introduced the poverty of Harlem:
Books of realistic fiction serve many functions for the children who read them. These functions range from entertainment to growth experiences. According to
Stewig (1988), an important purpose which can be served by realistic fiction is to help children cope with their own problems. Realistic fiction can also help children develop empathy for characters who live unfamiliar lives and encounter problems (economic and otherwise) which they have never visualized. Realistic works of fiction can help children see the difference between city and country environments and contrast rural poverty to that of city poverty.

Numerous studies show that a country's social and political philosophies are evident in its children's books. Cullinan (1989) summarized these studies:

Obviously, the social concerns that impinge upon authors are reflected in their work and show in the problems and conflicts they write about. In earlier books, the problems were often solved when virtue was rewarded, justice triumphed, and good overcame evil. More recently, this is not the case. Realistic fiction is frequently open-ended; the problem is not resolved and the central character accepts a less-than-perfect world (p. 33).

Weitzman (1972) contended that books serve to expose children to societal values and role models of what children can and should grow up to be. Hillman
(1971) stated that since role models in children's literature are potential motivators of thought and action, they should be scrutinized carefully.

Literature is an important means through which attitudes and values of a society are transmitted to its members, according to Dodson and Hause (1981). During the last half of the twentieth century there has been a trend toward realism in books for children.

Teachers and librarians need fine literature which portray various people in a realistic manner. Robinson (1966) stated the need of realistic children's books:

As children grow older, they become increasingly aware of, and interested in, another element of the real environment around them: the human beings who inhabit it (p. 135).

Arbuthnot (1969) has eloquently summarized the need for children's books:

Books are no substitute for living, but they can add immeasurably to its richness. When life is absorbing, books can enhance our sense of its significance. When life is difficult, they can give us momentary release from trouble or a new insight into our problems, or provide the rest and refreshment we need. Books have always been a source of information, comfort, and pleasure for
people who know how to use them. This is as true for children as for adults (p. 2).

If educators are going to rely on children's books to help students in dealing with social issues, problems, conflicts, and concerns, a closer look at the books they are reading is needed.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine how economically deprived people were portrayed in thirty selected works of children's literature through a content analysis of a sample of children's books written by authors and illustrators of Newbery and Caldecott Award winners and Honor Books. These books were chosen to ensure the quality of the literature being examined. Each book was analyzed to determine the extent to which the books characters present positive images or role models to young readers.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The following questions had special connotation to this study:

1. What was the character's physical description?
2. What was the character's language?
3. What was the character's environment?
4. What was the character's economic status?
5. How were all races, both genders and various ages portrayed?

6. What caused each book to be classified in this category?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An examination of stereotypes in literature in general which included specific references to economic conditions, especially as they pertain to minorities in our society, was conducted. This work then studied economic deprivation in selected children's books written by authors and illustrators of Caldecott and Newbery Award winners and Honor Books. Books of realistic fiction were selected because they portrayed universal human problems that children can relate to. A total of thirty books was selected and analyzed. (See Appendix A). Thirty selected children's books written by authors and illustrators of Caldecott and Newbery Award winners and Honor Book were read in order to determine how characters of economic deprivation were portrayed.

Analysis of the portrayal of economic deprivation in these books consisted of an indepth analysis of the following character traits as presented in each book. These character traits were:

1. Physical description
2. Language
3. Environment
4. Economic status

RESULTS

The questions formulated to provide a solution to the research problem are listed below with a discussion of the findings as indicated by the data analyzed. All of the data is summarized and presented in Appendix B.

Question 1. What was the character's physical description?

The character's physical description referred to the appearance of the character. Sixteen (100%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Caldecott Award and Honor Books were portrayed as attractive, while seventy-seven (81.9%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Newbery Award and Honor Books were attractive, thirteen (13.9%) were not attractive and four (4.2%) were not delineated.

Question 2. What was the character's language?

The character's language referred to the means and manner of spoken communication. Grammaticality referred to language which was grammatically correct. Thirteen (81.3%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Caldecott Award and Honor Books were fluent
and grammatical and three (18.7%) of the characters displayed no oral communication, while sixty-six (70.2%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Newbery Award and Honor Books were fluent and grammatical; and in twenty-eight (29.8%) of the characters language was absent.

Question 3. What is the character's status?

The character's status referred to the income level. Eleven (68.8%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Caldecott Award and Honor Books were poor; three (18.7%) were of moderate income; and two (12.5%) were of upper level income. Seventy-five (79.8%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Newbery Award and Honor Books were poor, eighteen (19.2%) were of moderate income, and one (1.0%) were of upper income.

In such Newbery books as Marchers for the Dream by Natalie Savage Carlson, Bethany Jackson and her family were evicted because of urban renewal. In Sharon Bell Mathis' Sidewalk Story, Tanya Brown and her mother were evicted because of economic deprivation. Tien Pao (The House of Sixty Fathers by Meindert DeJong) was homeless because of war. In The Family Under Bridge by Natalie Savage Carlson, Armand, Madame Calcet, and her children were among the homeless street people because of
economic deprivation. The Larkin's in *Blue Willow* by Doris Gates and the Huntley's in *Cotton in My Sack* by Lois Lenski endured poor living conditions because of their migratory life. The Slater's living conditions in *Strawberry Girl* by Lois Lenski were poor because they didn't believe in working. The Boyer's were poor sharecroppers.

Question 4. What is the character's environment?

The character's environment referred to the living conditions of the character. Eleven (68.8%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Caldecott Award and Honor Books were poor, three (18.7%) were moderate, and two (12.5%) were upper level. Seventy-five (79.8%) in the books written by winners of Newbery Award and Honor Books were poor, eighteen (19.2%) were moderate, and one (1.0%) was upper.

Question 5. How are all races, both genders and various ages portrayed?

Seven (43.8%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Caldecott Award and Honor Books were portrayed as Black, three (18.7%) were White, six (37.5%) were other, thirteen (81.3%) were male, three (18.7%) were female, fourteen (87.6%) were young, one (6.2%) was an adult and one (6.2%) was old.

The characters in Caldecott books who were
portrayed as Hispanic or Asian were classified as Other. These instances were found in Crow Boy by Taro Yashima (Chibi), My Dog Is Lost by Ezra Jack Keats (Juanito), and Pedro, the Angel of Olvera Street by Leo Politi (Pedro).

Twenty-six (27.7%) of the characters in the books written by winners of Newbery Award and Honor Books were portrayed as Black, sixty-two (66%) were white, and six (6.3%) were other, forty-four (46.8%) were males and fifty (53.2%) were female, forty-five (47.9%) were young, forty-one (43.6%) were adults and eight (8.5%) were old.

The characters in Newbery books who were portrayed as Hispanic or Asian were classified as Other in ... and now Miguel by Joseph Krumgold (Miguel, Gabriel, Old Blas and Grandfather Chavez), and The House of Sixty Fathers by Meindert DeJong (Tien Pao).

Question 6. What caused each book to be classified in this category of economic deprivation?

This work studied deprivation in selected children's books written by authors and illustrators of Caldecott and Newbery Award winners and Honor Books. Books of realistic fiction were selected because they portrayed universal human problems that children could relate to.
Bookfinder was the authoritative source used in locating children's books. It was created to match children and books. It is a reference work that describes and categorize 725 current children's books according to more than 450 psychological, behavioral, and developmental topics of concern to children and adolescents, aged 2 and up. It was written primarily for parents, teachers, librarians, counselors, psychologist, psychiatrists, and other adults who want to identify books that may help children cope with the challenges of life. The indices used to select all the books were poverty, economic status, differences, ghetto, prejudice, and social class.

DISCUSSION

Substantially more economically deprived characters described as attractive in the books written by winners of Caldecott and Newbery Award and Honor Book. However, the books written by winners of Caldecott Award and Honor Books portrayed young Black males as economically deprived at a significantly higher rate, while books written by winners of Newbery Award and Honor Books portrayed young white females as economically deprived at a slightly higher rate. Finally, more children than adults were portrayed as economically deprived in both Caldecott and Newbery Books.
References


Children, Youth and Families 100th Congress, second session, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC.


APPENDIX A

List of Selected Books Analyzed


Miracles of Maple Hill. V. Sorensen. New York:


APPENDIX B
Tables I - X

Table I
Physical Descriptions of Characters by Authors and Illustrators of Caldecott Award Winning and Honor Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books/Authors</th>
<th>Character</th>
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<th>Attractive</th>
<th>Delineated</th>
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<td>Keats</td>
<td>Sam</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben's Trumpet/Isadora</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crow Boy/Yashima</td>
<td>Chibi</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Goggles/Keats</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My Dog Is Lost/Keats</td>
<td>Juanito</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lilly</td>
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<td>Kim</td>
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<td>Angelo</td>
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<td>Susie</td>
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<td>Billy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bud</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedro, Angel/Politi</td>
<td>Pedro</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Grandpa</td>
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Table II
Language of Characters by Authors and Illustrators of Caldecott Award Winning and Honor Books

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<td>Ben</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben's Trumpet/Isadora</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crow Boy/Yashima</td>
<td>Chibi</td>
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<td>Goggles/Keats</td>
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<td>Archie</td>
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<td><strong>My Dog Is Lost/</strong></td>
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<td>Keats</td>
<td>Juanito</td>
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Environment of Characters by Authors and Illustrators of Caldecott Award Winning and Honor Books

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<tr>
<td>Isadora</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Goggles/</td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keats</td>
<td>Archie</td>
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<td>My Dog Is Lost/</td>
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Table IV
Economic Status of Characters by Authors and Illustrators of Caldecott Award Winning and Honor Books

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<td>Bud</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Table V
Race, Gender, and Ages of Characters by Authors and Illustrators of Caldecott Award Winning and Honor Books

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<th>Books/Authors</th>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Ben</td>
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Economic Status of Characters by Authors and Illustrators of Newbery Award Winning and Honor Books

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