A. Abstract

There are two central purposes to my research project. The first purpose will be to study how children's literature, specifically picture books, portrays individuals with disabilities. I will be looking at picture books published in the year 2008. The purpose of my project is to determine whether recent picture books portray individuals with disabilities realistically and positively. Disabilities should not be exaggerated or ignored, dramatized or minimized, nor romanticized or the cause of devaluation (Baskin & Harris, 1977). Authors should portray individuals with disabilities as unique, complex individuals the same way they portray individuals without disabilities. Furthermore, the second purpose of my research project will be to examine the quality of picture books published in the year 2008 that portray individuals with disabilities. It is essential that picture books that portray individuals with disabilities are quality picture books. They should not simply be deemed as good stories because they include individuals with disabilities. I will be looking for books that portray individuals with disabilities realistically and positively and are quality picture books. Picture books have many researched benefits when used in elementary classrooms. Picture books that portray individuals with disabilities can help children gain a better understanding of various disabilities and a greater appreciation for every individual. The picture books I will be studying can lead into class discussions about such issues.

In order to research my central questions I will use qualitative research methods. I will use this method because it will allow me to analyze picture books in ways that other methods would not. I will use textual analysis to study the context of each picture book. This will include both the pictures and the words. The relationship between the pictures and the words in picture books is extremely important. It would not be sufficient to study the text at the exclusion

of the words or vice versa. Using qualitative research methods will allow me to get a better picture of each book as a whole. Quantitative methods would not be appropriate for examining the content of picture books because they would give a very limited perspective on each book. Through textual analysis, I will analyze how each picture book characterizes individuals with disabilities and determine the quality of the picture book.

I believe that my research project will make a significant contribute to my field of study. Research has shown the impact picture books can have on children. Picture books that include characters with disabilities can be an effective means of teaching students about disabilities (Prater, 2000). Therefore, what I am studying is very relevant to elementary school teachers, special education teachers, librarians, parents, and many others. My research will provide an analysis of recent picture books that teachers can use in their classrooms. It will be a helpful resource to find books that portray characters with disabilities realistically and positively. In addition, it will give an assessment of the quality of these picture books. It is important that teachers have access to such information because it is a useful resource to use in their classrooms. Not only can such picture books be used to help students without disabilities understand disabilities and appreciate the each person's uniqueness but they can also be used to help students with disabilities relate to a character in the story. In addition, my research will contribute significantly to the field of children's literature. My research will shed light onto how recent picture books characterize individuals with disabilities and the quality of these picture books. I believe that this will be very useful for authors and illustrators of picture books as they strive to portray individuals with disabilities realistically and positively in future quality picture books.

In addition to contributing to my field of study, my research project will also contribute to my career preparation. As a teacher it will be important that I know what makes a quality picture book. By doing this project I will gain valuable experience analyzing picture books. I will use what I learn analyzing these picture books to help me pick out books to read to my students when I am a teacher. In addition, I will gain experience with the different ways that picture books characterize individuals with disabilities. This experience will help me be able to pick out non-biased picture books that I can use in my classroom. It is important that as a teacher I teach my students the value of diversity and that each person has unique characteristics that make them special. Through doing this research project I will contribute similar things to both my field of study and my own career preparation.

B. Summary of Pertinent Background and Context

Special education and the treatment of individuals with disabilities improved significantly throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Individuals with disabilities gained more human and civil rights. They are no longer marginalized in the ways in which they were in the past. These individuals are now recognized as important members of society who have the right to receive a free, appropriate, and public education. Individuals with disabilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extend appropriate (Osgood, 2008).

It is important that students with disabilities are a part of the general education classes that they are in. Teachers should teach their students about disabilities and promote acceptance and appreciation of all students in their classrooms. Children's literature is one tool teachers can use to do this. Pinsent (1993) shows how children's literature contributes to children's intellectual and emotional development. Nodelman (1996) adds to this by stating that dialoging about children's literature is an important aspect of using children's literature in the classroom.

However, studies on the effects of group discussion on children's attitudes toward peers with disabilities show that without an adult present group discussion among children can produce more negative views about children with disabilities than children had prior to the discussion (Bak, Gottlieb, & Siperstein, 2001). This suggests that it is important for adults to guide children's discussions on individuals with disabilities. Teachers should both read books that portray characters with disabilities and discuss them with students. Children's books that portray individuals with disabilities can be integrated into a variety of content areas (Prater, 2000). Dyches, Johnstun, and Prater (2006) and Pailliotet and Schmidt (2001) both agree that these books can be used to promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of those with disabilities.

Teachers should use quality picture books in their classrooms. Stewig (1995) argues that it is important that both the pictures and words must be strong in picture books. Therefore, in using children's literature to teach children about disabilities it is essential to use books that have both quality text and pictures. Furthering this notion, Lukens (2003) makes the claim that children's literature should be judged by the same standards as adult literature.

A variety of studies have researched how characters with disabilities are portrayed in children's literature. Heim (1994) found that children's books that portrayed characters with mental disabilities often portrayed them in stereotypical ways and were not quality children's books. Ayala (1999) discovered that while there were a greater number of books that portrayed people with disabilities than there had been the past and that these books featured a variety of disabilities, there was a lack of children's books representing multiethnic characters with disabilities. In addition, while Demetrulias (2000) found that books portraying characters with AD(H)D were generally realistic and of good quality, but there were not many books portraying

characters with AD(H)D. Cramer, Dyches, and Prater (2001) studied the characterization of mental retardation and autism in children's book. They discovered that there needs to be more books in which these individuals are seen as an integrated and accepted part of society, are portrayed in more helping roles, and in which the disability is only one of many character traits portrayed. Prater (2003) studied how learning disabilities are portrayed in adolescent literature. She found that there was a lack of books that portrayed characters with learning disabilities. Further studies by Dyches and Prater (2005) showed that characterization of developmental disabilities in children's fiction had improved since previous studies but that there was a need for future authors to add more depth and multidimensionality to characters with developmental disabilities. Most recently Weaver (2008) studied how Autism Spectrum Disorders are characterized in children's picture books. Overall she found that characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders were being portrayed realistically and positively.

There is a lack of studies on how individuals with a variety of disabilities are portrayed in picture books. While many studies show insight into how particular disabilities are portrayed in children's literature there is a need for studies that focus on a variety of disabilities in recent literature. It is necessary to see how the creators of picture books have responded to past research on this topic. My study examines pictures books from 2008 that feature individuals with a variety of disabilities. Since it is important that teachers use quality picture books in their classrooms I examine the quality of these picture books. Research shows that picture books are useful tools for teaching students about disabilities. Therefore it is important that students are exposed to a variety of quality picture books that portray characters with disabilities realistically and positively. In this study I examine whether or not recent picture books fit this description.

C. Working Bibliography

Ayala, E.C. (1999). "Poor little things" and "brave little souls": The portrayal of individuals with disabilities in children's literature. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 39(1), 103-114.

Ayala analyzed fifty-nine books for young children that portrayed characters with disabilities. From this he found that there are a great number of books that portray people with disabilities and a great variety of disabilities being portrayed in these books than in the past. However, he also discovered that there is a lack of children's books representing multiethnic characters with disabilities. This is relevant to my project because it gives me information on children's books that portray people with disabilities, including what these books are lacking.

Bak, J.J., Gottlieb, J., & Siperstein, G.N. (2001). Effects of group discussion on children's attitudes toward handicapped peers. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 131-134).

In this article Bak, Gottlieb, and Siperstein showed that children's interactions in groups may be an important factor in determining to what extent handicapped children will be accepted or rejected. To come to this conclusion they assessed sixth graders' attitudes toward disabled and non-disabled peers presented in photographs and on video tape prior to, during, and after discussion in small groups, without an adult present. Their results showed that children's individual attitudes toward children with disabilities became more negative after group discussions. This article is relevant to my topic because it shows that group discussions can alter children's views on children with disabilities.

Ball, A.L., & Sotto, C.D. (2006). Dynamic characters with communication disorders in children's literature. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42(1), 40-45.

In this article, Ball and Sotto provide a list of contemporary children's books that involve main characters with communication impairments who are actively involved in the plot. They also give suggestions on how teachers can use children's literature to provide positive role models for students with communication disorders and promote understanding of diverse populations. They stress that children's literature can be effective teaching tool for students. This article is relevant to my topic because it shows how children's literature that portrays characters with communication disorders can be used in the classroom.

Baskin, B.H., & Harris, K.H. (1984). *More notes from a different drummer: A guide to juvenile fiction portraying the disabled.* New York: R.R. Bowker Company.

In this book the authors of *Notes from a different drummer: A guide to juvenile fiction portraying the handicapped* expand their previous research to study books written during the early critical years of the mainstreaming experiment and containing characters with impairments. This has

been a significantly referenced book in related research projects. The way that they analyzed the picture books would be helpful to look at for my research project.

Baskin, B.H., & Harris, K.H. (1977). *Notes from a different drummer: A guide to juvenile fiction portraying the handicapped.* New York: R. R. Bowker Company.

This book is a guide to juvenile fiction published between 1940-1975 that depicted handicapped characters. They analyzed the books based on how the impairments were treated in them and the books' literary qualities. Baskin and Harris also analyzed the pictures in these books. Their main beliefs regarding the portrayed of handicapped characters in children's fiction is that impairment should not be exaggerated or ignored, dramatized or minimized, or romanticized or the cause of devaluation. This book will help me see how handicapped people have been portrayed in past picture books and how people believe they should be portrayed.

Clark, C., Dyson, A., Millward, A.J., & Skidmore, D. (1997). New directions in special needs:

Innovations in mainstream schools. London: Cassell.

This book shows how the development of special needs education in mainstream schools has been pushed along by values of equality and common educational experiences. The authors of this book tell what has happened since special needs education was implemented in mainstream schools. They suggest that approaches to special needs education needs to be driven by evidence and not just values. This book is helpful for my project because it shows how special education has changed.

Cramer, S.F., Dyches, T.T., & Prater, M.A. (2001). Characterization of mental retardation and autism in children's books. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Development Disabilities*, 36(3), 230-243.

Cramer, Dyches, and Prater analyzed how characters with mental retardation and autism are portrayed in contemporary children's literature as well as related issues discussed within the plot. They analyzed books with an initial publication date of 1997 or 1998. They used the Dyches and Prater (2000) guidelines. This article will be helpful for my project because it gives more recent information on how character with mental retardation and autism are portrayed in contemporary children's literature.

Daniels, K. (2004). What teachers never taught and writers feared to write: Disability in African American children's literature. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 24(1), Retrieved November 15, 2008 from http://www.dsq-sds-archives.org/index.html

In this article Daniels argues that some African American children's literature reflects the negative stereotypes that are ascribed to individuals with disabilities. These books use characters that are implausible, one-dimensional, and expected to perform acts of heroism to gain acceptance. Daniels states that these texts need to be used critically to combat stereotypes about African Americans with disabilities. This article is relevant to my topic because it gives information on how African American children's literature portrays individuals with disabilities.

Demetrulias, D.M. (2000). The depiction in juvenile literature of children with attention deficit disorder.

Journal of Youth Services in Libraries, 13(2), 36-42.

In this article Demetrulias states that while children's literature in an important resource for parents and teachers as they nurture children with AD(H)D and contribute to their triumphant growth into adulthood there is a small amount of juvenile literature that portrays children with AD(H)D. However, Demetrulias found out that the literature that is out there depicts AD(H)D in a way that is congruent with empirical research and that the overall message of these books is positive and encouraging. This article is relevant to my project because it shows how children's literature has portrayed children with AD(H)D.

Dyches, T.T, Prater, M.A., & Jenson, J. (20060. Portrayal of disabilities in Caldecott books. *Teaching*

Exceptional Children Plus, 2(5), Retrieved November 15, 2008 from

http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol2/iss5/art2.

Dyches, Prater, and Jenson read the books that received Caldecott Medal and Honor status awarded between 1938 and 2005. They found that eleven included a character with a disability. They analyzed how each of these books characterized those with disabilities and generated tips for using each book to teach about disabilities. In this article they argued that there is a need for accurate portrayals of characters with disabilities in award-winning picture books. This article will help my research project by giving me examples of award-winning picture books that portray individuals with disabilities.

Dyches, T.T., Johnstun, M., & Prater, M.A. (2006). Teaching students about learning disabilities

through children's literature. Intervention in School and Clinic, 42(1), 14-24.

In this article Dyches, Johnstun, and Prater state that children's literature that portrays characters with disabilities can be used to promote awareness, understanding, and acceptance of those with disabilities. They provide guidelines for selecting high-quality literature and ideas for using characterizations of learning disabilities to teach students about themselves and others. This article is relevant to my project because it shows how children's literature can be used to teach students about learning disabilities.

Dyches, T.T., & Prater, M.A. (2005). Characterization of developmental disability in children's fiction.

Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 40(3), 202-216.

In this study Dyches and Prater used the Dyches and Prater (2000) guidelines to evaluate thirty-four children's books published during 1999-2003 that portrayed characters with developmental disabilities. These guidelines included both general literary standards and standards related to the portrayal of individuals with developmental disabilities. They stated that characterization of individuals with disabilities in contemporary children's literature should be both positive and realistic. They found out that the portrayal of characters with developmental disabilities has improved since previous studies on books published at earlier times. They concluded that future authors should add depth and multidimensionality to characters with developmental disabilities. This article is relevant to my topic because it shows how the portrayal of individuals with developmental disabilities in children's books has changed recently.

Dyches, T.T., & Prater, M.A. (2008). Books that portray characters with disabilities: A top 25 list for children and young adults. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 40(4), 32-38.

In this article Dyches and Prater give a list of what they consider to be the top twenty-five books in juvenile literature that portray disabilities. They used the Dyches and Prater guidelines to evaluate books based on their high literary and artistic quality as well as multidimensional portrayals of characters with disabilities. This article will help me with my topic because it gives an example of quality children's literature that portrays characters with disabilities.

Guroian, V. (1998). Tending the heart of virtue: How classic stories awaken children's moral

imagination. New York: Oxford University Press, INC.

In this book Guroian offers a guide through some of the most beloved fairy tales and classic and contemporary fantasy stories written for children. He states that moral formation is an important aspect of childhood. He believes that children should be taught morals intentionally, not left to figure them out for themselves. This book is relevant to my topic because it shows that stories can be used to teach children morals.

Heim, A.B. (1994). Beyond the stereotypes: Characters with mental disabilities in children's books.

School Library Journal, 139-142.

In this article Heim argues that children's books that portray characters with mental disabilities often portray them in a stereotypical way. In addition argues that these books are often not quality books. She shares her criteria for evaluating children's books that portray characters with mental disabilities and six young adult novels that meet her criteria. This article will be useful for my project because it gives me an idea of what makes quality books that portray characters with mental disabilities.

Hepler, S., Huck, C. S., Hickman, J., & Kiefer, B. Z. (2001). *Children's literature in the elementary school* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

This is a text book designed for courses on teaching children's literature in elementary school. In it many different topics are addressed. The chapter that is most relevant to my topic is chapter nine which is titled: Contemporary Realistic Fiction. In this chapter there is a section titled: Coping with Problems of the Human Condition. This section addresses physical disabilities, development and learning disabilities, and mental illness and how they should be portrayed in children's literature.

Hipsky, S., & Iaquinta, A. (2006). Practical bibliotherapy strategies for the inclusive elementary classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34(3), 209-213.

This article was designed to help regular education elementary classroom teachers in using bibliotherapy strategies in an inclusive classroom. Bilbiotherapy is useful because it helps disabled students gain personal insight and grow by identifying with a main character in a story that has a disability. This article teaches teachers to use a checklist to select appropriate books and lead classroom discussions. This article is relevant to my topic because it shows how using picture books that portray individuals with disabilities help students with disabilities.

Kohl, H. (1995). Should we burn Babar?: Essays on children's literature and the power of stories. New

York: The New Press.

This book is a collect of essays about the power of stories. Kohl wrote this book out of his worry that stories are being abandoned as powerful tools of teaching and learning. This book helps support my topic by showing the importance of children's literature in the classroom.

Long, K. (1977). "Johnny's such a bright boy, what a shame he's retarded." Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

In this book, Long uses a fictional story with research and factual information woven in to show the complexities of the labeling/segregation situation, the benefits of mainstreaming, and the need for change in special education. This book is relevant to my topic because it helps show changes in special education and how people with special needs are treated.

Lukens, R.J. (2003). *A critical handbook of children's literature*. (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, INC.

This book is intended to be used in college courses on children's literature. In it Lukens proposes that writing for children should be judged by the same standards as writing for adults. This book addresses formal criticism, the techniques of the New Critic, and reader-response theory. By doing this the book teaches teachers-in-training how to judge children's literature. This book would be helpful to look at when I am judging the quality of the picture books I am looking at.

Nodelman, P. (1988). Words about pictures: The narrative art of children's picture books. Athens, GA:

University of Georgia Press.

This book discusses the relationship between the pictures and text in picture books and how they define and amplify each other. Pictures in picture books exist to assist in the telling of stories. The unique relationship between the words and the pictures makes picture books unique. Discussion of picture books should include the visual elements present in picture books. Pictures should be discussed for their narrative elements, not in the way traditional art should be discussed. This book is relevant to my research project because it discusses the importance picture play in picture books.

Nodelman, P. (1996). *The pleasures of children's literature*. (2nd ed.). White Plain, NY: Longman

Publishers USA.

In this book, Nodelman says that experiencing and responding to children's literature can and should be a pleasurable experience for adults and children. Much of this pleasure comes from dialog about the literature. Nodelman discusses how to read children's literature and differences between it and adult literature. This book is relevant to my topic in that is shows the importance of dialoging about picture books with children in addition to simply reading the books.

Osgood, R.J. (2008). The history of special education: A struggle for equality in American public

schools. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers

In order to write this book Osgood put historical research on disability with historical research on children. He relied heavily on records of public school and public institutions. His study provides an introduction on how disabled children in general have been treated since the midnineteenth century. This book is relevant to my topic in that it shows how children with disabilities have gained human and civil rights.

Pailliotet, A. W., & Schmidt, P. R. (Eds.). (2001). Exploring values through literature, multimedia, and

literacy events: Making connections. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.

In this book, Pailliotet states that children can learn values through literature. Children can learn to appreciate diversity through literature, multimedia, and literacy events. There needs to be explicit study of values in classrooms. This is relevant to my topic because it shows that children can learn to appreciate the differences of people with special needs through picture books.

Pinsent, P. (Ed.). (1993). The power of the page: Children's books and their readers. London: David

Fulton Publishers Ltd

In this book Pinsent presents a variety of research on the importance of children's literature. His thesis is that children not only enjoy literature, but that it also contributes to their intellectual and emotional development. This book is relevant to my topic because it shows the importance that children's literature can play in a children's development.

Pinsent, P. (1997). Children's literature and the politics of equality. New York: Teacher's College

Press.

This book discusses prejudice in children's literature. It states that it is important that children are alerted to the ways in which literature may convey prejudice. It is important that teachers, librarians, and parents can recognize what is unsatisfactory in books written now and in the past and that they teach children this. We need good books, not just politically correct books. Even books that display prejudice can be used to combat prejudice. This book helps show the importance of the research project I am conducting.

Prater, M.A. (2000). Using juvenile literature with portrayals of disabilities in your classroom.

Intervention in School and Clinic, 35(3), 167-176.

In this article Prater states that children's books that include portrayals of characters with disabilities can be an effective means of teaching students about disabilities and that classroom discussion of such books can be integrated with other content areas. Prater describes forty-six frequently recommended children's books that portray characters with disabilities and gives ideas for specific classroom use. This article is relevant to my topic because in it Prater states that children's books can be effective means of teaching students about disabilities.

Prater, M.A. (2003). Learning disabilities in children's and adolescent literature: How are the characters

portrayed?. Learning Disability Quarterly, 26, 47-62.

In her study, Prater evaluated ninety fictional books written for children or adolescents that portrayed at least one character with a learning disability. Her research is important for my project because it shows how children's literature has portrayed children with learning disabilities.

Quicke, J. (1985). Disability in modern children's fiction. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

In this book, Quicke discusses how fiction can be used to help children explore their thoughts and feelings about disabilities. Fiction can provide information on a disability that would be less traumatic than a visit, it can act as a bridge between traditional and progressive approaches to curricula, it can deal with aspects of disability that cannot be dealt with in any other way, and it can provide a total pictures of the experience of disability in the context of a story that captures the imagination of the reader. Quicke studied disability in children's fiction to determine the quality of the books. He found that most books that portrayed people with disabilities lacked quality and that critics often failed to give good critiques of these books. This book emphasis the importance of analyzing books honestly no matter what their subject matter.

Solis, S. (2004). The disabilitymaking factory: Manufacturing "differences" through children's books.

archives.org/index.html.

In this article Solis reviewed ten children's books published since the year 2000 to determine possible interpretations about disability. He references postmodern theory to challenge the division between disability and able-bodiedness. He states that children's books about disability will influence children's opinions about disability. In Solis' opinion what is dangerous in children's books about disability is the way in which they tend to uphold social structures such as disability and normalcy as authentic and therefore indisputable. This article will help me because it points out an important aspect of children's books and the messages they give about being disabled versus non-disabled.

Stelle, L.C.H. (1999). Review of children's literature: Children with disabilities as main characters.

Intervention in School and Clinic, 35(2), 123-128.

In this article Stelle states that children's literature can be used to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities and to encourage positive peer relationships among children of differing abilities. Stelle reviewed thirty-one children's books for this article. Her purpose was that teachers will integrate the books across curriculum areas or place them in their classroom libraries. This article is relevant to my project because it gives example of different books that portrayed children with disabilities and tells the quality of books that they are. In addition, the criteria that she used to judge the books would be helpful for my project.

Stewig, J. W. (1995). Looking at picture books. Fort Atkinson, WI: Highsmith Press.

In this book, Stewig states that picture books enrich children's understanding of language, pictures, and how the two work together. He also states that pictures and the words are very important in picture book; each component must be strong. In regard to my topic, this book

shows that it is important to look at how both the words and pictures in picture books portray people with disabilities.

Vandergrift, K.E. (1990). *Children's literature: Theory, research, and teaching*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, INC.

In this book, Vandergrift gives information on theory, research, and teaching in the field of children's literature. The main aspect of this book that is relevant to my topic deals with content analysis. Vandergrift makes the argument that content analysis studies have been tainted, to some degree, by personal biases of the investigators relying only on their own coding. Therefore, it is important that I do my best to eliminate my bias in my study while at the same time acknowledging that it is impossible to do this completely.

Weaver, C. (2008). Characterization of autism spectrum disorders in children's picture books.

Unpublished master's thesis, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

In this article Weaver shares the results of her research project in which she evaluated forty-two children's picture books that portrayed characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders. She evaluated how symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorders are being portrayed and determined the common themes found in these books. She used behavioral checklists created using symptoms found in common Autism Spectrum Disorders diagnostic rating scales. Overall she found out that characters with Autism Spectrum Disorders are being portrayed realistically and positively. This article is relevant to my topic because it shows how Autism Spectrum Disorders are being portrayed in picture books.

D. Preliminary Reflections on Faith and Scholarship

My faith as a Christian has influenced how I look at my scholarly vocation as a future teacher. One of my principle beliefs is in the value of children as made clear in the Bible. While I love kids, I want to be a teacher for higher reasons than this. I want to be an instrument of God's grace, peace, truth, and love in this world. I believe that this is my higher calling as a teacher. I do not take my responsibilities as a teacher lightly. James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." The chapter then goes on to use imagery to show the power that a teacher has to shape the minds of those he or she teaches.

My research project means a lot to me personally. One of the main influences in my life has been family, including my stepbrother. My stepbrother received special education services as a student with an emotional disability. Due to his behavior, it was easy for people to label him as simply a bad kid. They did not take the time to get to know him and see the strengths that he had. I believe that this hindered relationships he had with his peers and others. Therefore, I have a special interest in making sure that picture books portray individuals with disabilities positively and realistically. I believe that this can help the way people see them and therefore help their relationships in general.

In addition, I have a special interest in children's literature. I have always loved reading good books. This was particularly true when I was an elementary school student. I believe that picture books have a power to teach students. I have learned from my own experiences as a student the way picture books can help shape students' minds. I remember my own teachers using picture books to lead into group discussions about different issues. In addition, I think that when teachers read quality picture books to students and provided them in the classroom it helps shape students in people who enjoy reading. Therefore, I have both a personal interest in the way picture books portray individuals with disabilities and the quality of picture books.

One of my favorite Bible passages is Psalm 139:12-14a, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." As a Christian, I believe that God created each person uniquely and in His own image. This includes people with and without disabilities. Therefore, I think that picture books need to portray people with disabilities realistically and positively for a greater reason than the books to be politically correct. I believe that these books need to reflect the reality of each individual's value.

In addition, I believe in the power of stories. One of the ways God reveals himself and His plan to us is through the Bible. In the Bible itself, Jesus tells many parables to illustrate his most important points. Therefore, I think that stories told in picture books are important teaching tools. It is necessary that these stories reflect truth so that they do not distort children's views of individuals with disabilities. My personal experiences, who I am as an individual, and my faith all inform my work on my research project.

E. Evaluation Process

Analysis of picture books 25%

Synthesis of information 25%

Documentation of sources 25%

Final product/process 25%