Chapter 5
Teachers' Decision–Making Process:
Inclusive Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines teachers' decision-making processes of selecting and implementing inclusive literature, especially in relation to children with disabilities, in their teaching practices. Inclusive literature celebrates diversity helping the individual see himself as well as others. Inclusive literature educates everybody about everyone, and books can help reduce prejudice. Diversity in literature impacts how children view disability and allows them to understand society. Realistic portrayals of a character with a disability can have positive impact on attitudes of students without disabilities towards peers with disabilities. The chapter will address effective strategies for selecting relevant and appropriate stories and books. In addition, the chapter will address effective strategies for using inclusive literature.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers make multiple decisions throughout the day constantly negotiating knowledge, and skills, drawing upon their perceptions and values. Classrooms in the 21st century are more diverse than ever with multiple languages, cultures, beliefs, and abilities. To work effectively in inclusive settings, teachers need to have the appropriate values and attitudes, skills and competences, knowledge and understanding to make solid decisions, including the selection and use of literature in the classroom. It is important to understand the context of this decision-making process and external and internal forces inherent in this

decision-making process. In this chapter, the concepts of inclusion, inclusive literature and teacher effectiveness will form the context and background. The external factors impacting this decision-making include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and availability and quality of inclusive literature. Internal factors impacting decision-making include teacher values and dispositions, lack of familiarity with books, and book selection related to the creation of a pedagogy of inclusiveness. Upon completion of this chapter, the reader will better comprehend the factors impacting decision-making with inclusive literature.

BACKGROUND

Important factors in understanding decision-making with inclusive literature include the importance of literature, nature of inclusive literature, aspects of effective teaching, and the impact of values, cognition and behavior. These factors all impact decision-making and the use of inclusive literature in the classroom.

Importance of Literature

To fully understand decision making with literature background on the value and importance of literature read with children is necessary. Literature read with and to children has long been recognized as having beneficial effects on academic learning and literacy. Reading together is an essential practice within the literacy curriculum of elementary schools and is known to have beneficial academic effects. Many values of reading with children including enjoyment, reading for a purpose, developing a sense of story, increasing vocabulary, expanding linguistic repertoire, and creating a community of readers connected through shared knowledge (Fountas &Pinnell, 2016). In his classic *Reading Handbook*, Jim Trelease explains how reading together awakens imagination, improves language skill, functions as the heart of education, and serves as the single most important social factor in American life (Trelease, 2017).

Although the power of reading to and with children as a tool for gaining and improving literacy skills is well documented, it may also hold potential power as a tool for developing an inclusive environment. Authors and teachers comment on the effect of various books upon their lives. Anna Quindlen writes that through books she:

traveled not only to other worlds, but unto my own... learned who I was... wanted to be... might aspire to, ...might dare to dream about my world and myself...learned the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. (Quindlen, 1998, p. 6)

Reading stories is a way of introducing students to life, the mind, the value of personal experience and stories, and the ability to courageously question themselves and life (Kohl, 1995). Literature can be a mirror and window for the reader, reflecting to children a view of themselves, and showing what other people are like and seeing themselves as part of humanity (Bishop, 1990).

It is essential to address the issue of labeling race and ethnicity with students at grade school as these labels have the potential of either empowering or demoralizing a person in terms of self-identity, power, and worth. More importantly, allowing others to label your own identity takes away your power to de-

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