



Creation and Implementation of a Disability-Inclusive Children’s Literature Database

Katie Beth Sharp, OTS; K. Megan Carpenter, OTD, OTR/L, SCFES
Department of Occupational Therapy | University of Alabama at Birmingham

Introduction

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 6 children between 3 and 17 years old have at least one developmental disability, yet a 2019 study by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) showed only 3.4% of children’s books feature a main character with a disability (CDC, 2024; Tyner, 2020).
- The most common main character in children’s literature was white, representing 41.8% of children’s books.
- The second most common main character was not another race or ability category but was “animal/other,” coming in at 29.2% of all children’s books.
- Disability-inclusive literature is ranked number 6 out of 10 categories for frequency of representation in children’s books examined in the CCBC study (Tyner, 2020).
- Previous research shows:
 - Limited studies focus on the examination and categorization of disability-inclusive books (Gilmore & Howard, 2016)
 - Limited studies examine the peer-relationship between typically developing children and their peers with disabilities by introducing disability-inclusive children’s books (DICB) into the classroom (Lian et al., 2020)
 - Limited information about DICB is easily accessible to caregivers, teachers, and students.
 - Important to include both bookstores and online book vendors (Price et al., 2016)
- DICB can be used to promote occupational identity, occupational participation, and occupational justice (AOTA, 2020; Hansson et al., 2022)
- The purpose of this capstone project was to create a database that provides a list of DICBs.
 - divided into disability categories
 - suggested age rating
 - what disability is represented
 - link to easily access/order the book.
- The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) focus areas identified for this project are program development and advocacy.

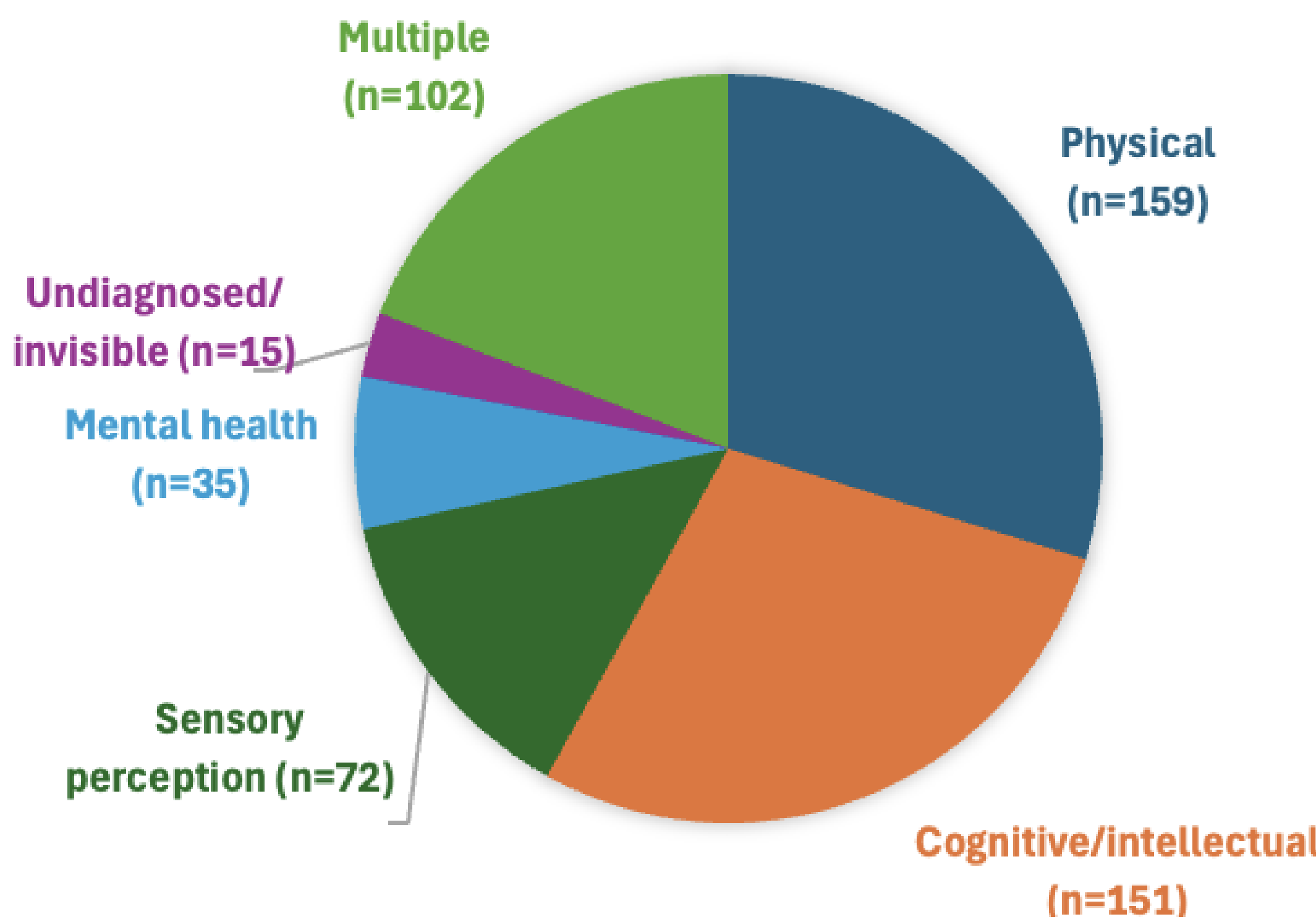
Methods

- Phase I**
- Books from relevant research and Google searches for DICB (n=713) were compiled on a master list including:
 - Book title
 - Link used to access
- Phase II**
- Individual books were assessed to determine eligibility for inclusion:
 - Disability represented
 - Disability category
 - Age rating for 0-18
- Phase III**
- Books separated by disability category.
 - PDF was created for each disability category with a list of each book in the category including a photo of each book cover and a hyperlink to access/buy the book.
 - Books sorted by category first, age rating second, and author’s name thirdly
- Phase IV**
- Website information:** purpose of database, how to access books, 3 featured DICBs, 1 featured book for adults/caregivers, a link to survey.
 - created in accordance with UAB’s accessible website formatting
 - PDFs of each disability category DICB list was accessible via buttons on homepage of website
 - Survey for feedback:** 10-question survey to determine efficacy of usefulness of the database
 - Sustainability plan:** featured book rotations, update list at least every 3 years
 - Distribution:** flyer distributed to libraries in Birmingham metro area, social media posts via UAB OT and UAB SHP, shared with pediatric sites affiliated with UAB OT

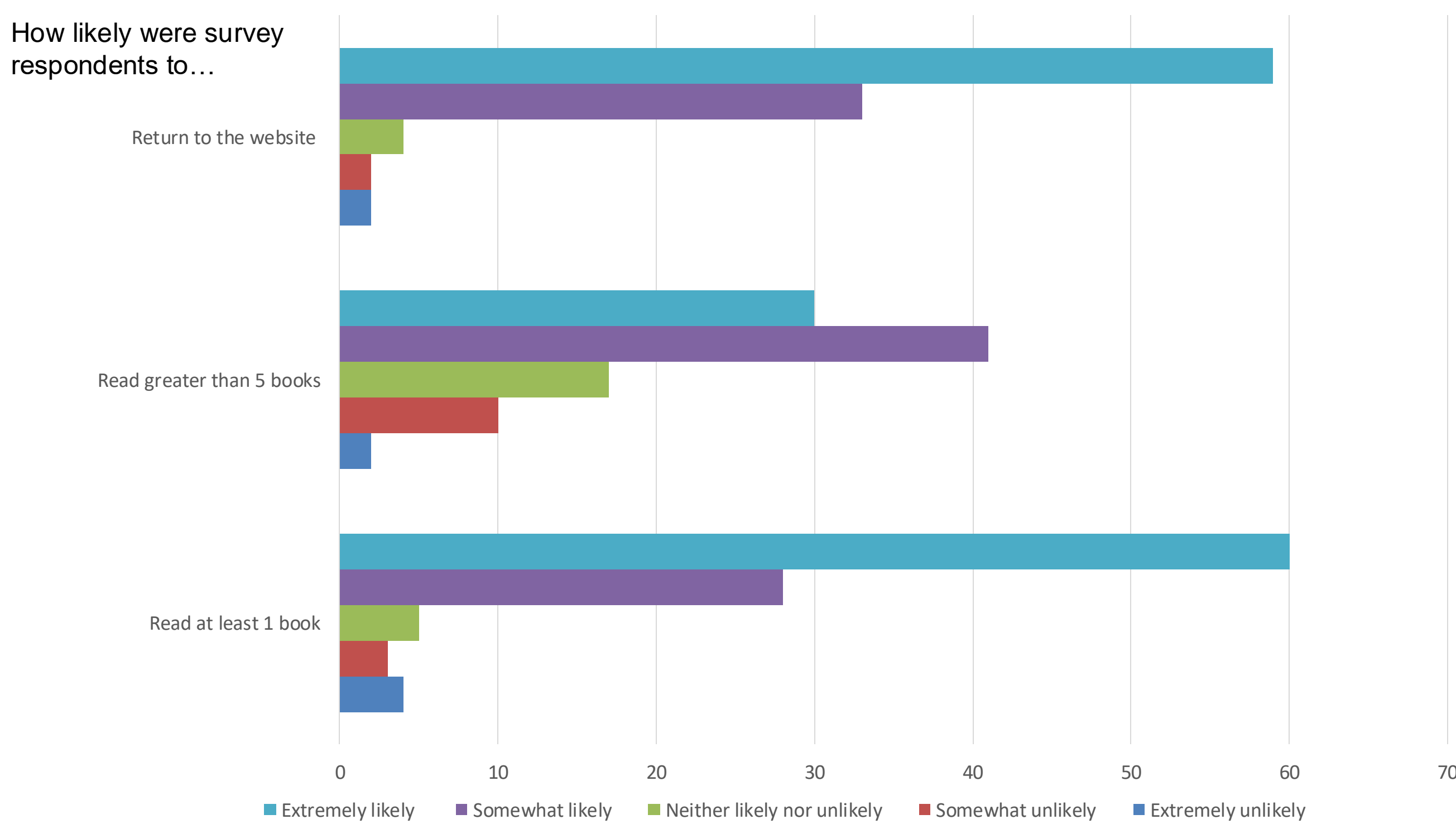
Results

- Books that met inclusion criteria (n=534) were included on the DICB database.
- Website patrons were prompted to take a survey after exploring the database.
- Survey results (n=114)
 - 61% aged 18-29
 - 21% aged 30-49
 - 17% aged 50-69
 - 1% aged 70+

Frequency of representation for each disability category



Survey feedback for content and website retention (%)
n=113



Discussion

Survey feedback

- Creation of the DICB database was an important initiative based on survey feedback
- Most common method of discovering the database was through social media
- The least common method of discovering the database was from the flyer
- Most survey respondents were likely to utilize content provided on database
- 92% of survey respondents reported ease during navigating website and database
- Overwhelmingly positive response for website retention (92%)

Limitations

- Limited timeframe for promotion and survey responses to be recorded
- Books have not been formally analyzed to determine authentic vs. ableist views

Future directions

- Examine impact of DICB for both children with disabilities and typically developing children
- Expand database to include adults
- Analyze books for authentic representation
- Effects of DICB for mental health of adolescents

Conclusion

- Database can be used to find DICB that help to promote and advocate for children with disabilities
- Beneficial for all professionals to implement
- This project supports the importance for advocating and promoting authentic representation of characters with disabilities in children’s books

References

- American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(Suppl. 2), 7412410010. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May 16). *Developmental disability basics*. <https://www.cdc.gov/child-development/about/developmental-disability-basics.html>
- Gilmore, L. & Howard, G. (2016). Children’s books that promote understanding of difference, diversity and disability. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 26(2), 218–251. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jgc.2016.26>
- Hansson, S. O., Carlstedt, A. B., & Morville, A. (2022). Occupational identity in occupational therapy: A concept analysis. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 29(3), 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2021.1948608>
- Lian, F., Zhang, Z., Ma, W., Wang, M., & Lin, Y. (2020). Improving typically developing children’s acceptance toward children with autism via teaching with picture books. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 68(3), 354–364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2020.1786325>
- Price, C. L., Ostrosky, M. M., & Mouzourou, C. (2016). Exploring representations of characters with disabilities in library books. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 44(6), 563–572. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-015-0740-3>
- Tyner, M. (2020, June 16). *The numbers are in: 2019 CCBC diversity statistics*. CCBlogC. <https://ccblogc.blogspot.com/2020/06/the-numbers-are-in-2019-ccbc-diversity.html>

Acknowledgement & Contact information

Special thanks to: Dr. Megan Carpenter, Kevin Storr, Michelle Cheng, and Emily Delzell

Contact information: Katie Beth Sharp (kesharp@uab.edu)

