

2010

A Need for Picture Books Showing Girls Playing Organized Team Sports

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to create a children's picture storybook depicting female characters participating in competitive team athletics. The book shows a young girl learning about the game of basketball and sharing the experience with her older sister. The researcher has a long history of athletic participation and a deep passion for sports. These experiences allowed the researcher to capture the essence of the sport of basketball and create a picture book for children that engages the reader and possibly encourages participation in athletics for children of various ages. The book gives young, athletic girls an early experience with sports literature.

A NEED FOR PICTURE BOOKS SHOWING GIRLS PLAYING ORGANIZED
TEAM SPORTS

A Graduate Research Project
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

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May 2010

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Titled: A Need for Picture Books Showing Girls Playing Organized Team Sports

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Degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I had female role models to look up to starting in middle school, athletes like Julie Foudy and Mia Hamm, who made me realize that there was room in the world of sports for women. They ignited my dream of becoming an Olympic athlete. -Jennie Finch, pitcher for the USA softball team (Stewart, Kennedy, & Jaffe, 2009)

Athletes quite often become role models for children of all ages. Little boys may aspire to become great basketball stars like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant. They see football stars play in the Super Bowl, baseball stars in the World Series, and hockey stars in the Stanley Cup. Boys even get to see their sports heroes succeed in extreme sports like skateboarding and snowboarding. Male athletes are visible on television, radio, in magazines and newspapers all over the country. According to Hardin & Dodd (2006), "Sportswomen have historically been underrepresented and misrepresented in overall coverage, despite increases in their opportunities and participation" (p. 110). The popularity of women's individual and team sports has been on the rise over the past few decades and society is starting to take note through a slow increase in media coverage.

According to Brown (1996) the 1996 Olympic Games were one of the first opportunities for young girls to see female athletes' performances on television. The increased coverage of women's team and individual athletics during the Olympic

Games was in part due to an effort by television company NBC to increase female viewers. “The most compelling stories, the most exciting competition, the most inspiring achievements involved women in general and American women in particular” (p. 48). The women’s athletic events at the Olympics were so highly anticipated that *Newsweek* magazine’s pre-Olympics issue was titled *Year of the Woman*.

It is important for young girls to see women playing sports in the media because it gives girls an opportunity to see successful women and begin to view them as role models. “If girls had more opportunities to see successful female athlete role models, perhaps a greater number of young women would stay involved with sports and live a more active lifestyle” (Redmond, Ridinger & Battenfield, 2009, p. 79).

The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (2008) notes the importance of media portrayal of female athletes: “The under representation of female athletes in the media limits the role models girls and young women have” (p. 2). Aside from television and magazines, books are a form of media that can introduce children to activities and experiences that they may encounter in their lives. While television shows the game, books tell the story of the game including the emotions, trials and tribulations that children may experience in their lives. This research project will produce a picture book depicting female characters participating in team sports with other females.

History of Women’s Athletics

“With the current sport environment for women, it is difficult to imagine that most females in the 45 to 95-year age-range at the turn of the twenty-first century were never offered school-sponsored interscholastic competitive sports” (Mawson, 2006,

p.22). In 1972, a law was passed prohibiting sex discrimination in all federally assisted educational programs. This law, Title IX, includes all aspects of education from classrooms to athletics and has given women more opportunities to excel in all areas of education. In 1997, Riley & Cantú studied the impact Title IX had in it's first 25 years. Their study showed that the number of high school girls participating in interscholastic sports increased from 300,000 in 1972 to 2.4 million in 1997. Girls high school basketball alone saw an increase of over 300% during that time (Riley & Cantú). While basketball, softball, soccer, and volleyball continue to be popular with girls, there is growing interest in other team sports such as lacrosse, rugby, and ice hockey.

Giuliano (2007) notes that men's athletic events continue to draw more media coverage than women's; however, some media outlets are beginning to consider female athletes as more newsworthy. Television stations that cater to sports fans such as CSTV, ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, and Fox College Sports, have increased their regular coverage of women's softball, basketball, soccer, and volleyball games at the collegiate level (Lipka, 2006). The increase in visibility and popularity of women's sports means that aspiring young athletic females have more access to a source of female role models, a privilege most of their mothers may not have enjoyed having grown up during the early years of Title IX (Guiliano, 2007).

All across America, young girls have the opportunity to begin playing organized team sports starting as young as age four. The YMCA has developed the Rookie League for ages four to seven, while the eight to sixteen-year-olds can participate in the Winners League (YMCA, 2008). Other organizations, including the Amateur Athletic

Union, also have similar programs set up for girls of all ages to participate in all types of sports (Amateur Athletic Union, 2008).

Interest and support for female athletics has spread into the World Wide Web as many organizations have set up web sites encouraging girls to participate in sports. Sites such as *Girl Power* and *Girls Inc.* not only have links for sports, but also academics and social issues as well. If female athletics are being increasingly covered on television, the Internet, radio, and in print media, they should also be included in children's literature. However, a recent search in library databases shows a lack of picture books about female athletics.

Lack of Picture Books about Females in Organized Team Sports

Books about football, hockey, soccer, and basketball dominate the shelves of many libraries' sports fiction collections. Although the trend in society is that more girls are playing sports, it seems as though book publishers have not taken note of this trend and therefore may not be meeting the interests of so many athletic girls.

A keyword search was carried out in *World Cat* and *Books in Print* databases. The researcher included terms pertaining to girls team sports with the format for juvenile fiction. The terms used for the search were: *girls sports and juvenile fiction*, *girls and team sports and fiction*, *girls basketball and juvenile fiction*, *girls volleyball and juvenile fiction*, *girls softball and juvenile fiction*, *girls soccer and juvenile fiction*, *girls hockey and juvenile fiction*, *girls rugby and juvenile fiction*, *girls and organized sports*, and *juvenile sports fiction*. The researcher considered whether materials were recent fiction or non-fiction, whether they fit the definition of a picture book as found in

the Children's Literature Dictionary (Latrobe, Brodie & White, 2002), and whether the material was about an organized team sport.

Only books that have been published since 1999 were selected based on the suggestion by Johnson (2004) that, "70 percent of the library collection should consist of materials with copyright dates of less than 10 years old" (p. 12). In addition, only books that were published in the United States were included in this research.

The *WorldCat* and *Books in Print* searches resulted in 126 different titles published since 1999 with a sports theme matching the picture book description. Of the 126 titles, only 21 titles, or 17%, of them featured a female main character participating in an organized team sport. The two sports most often depicted with female characters were soccer with 13 titles, and baseball with 5 titles. The number of titles showing male main characters was 81, or 64%. There were also 24 titles, 19%, showing both male and female main characters; however the summaries of these books showed that the female character involved was most likely participating on an all male sports team and played a more supportive role in the plot. The data from this search showed more than three times as many picture story books depicting male characters participating in sports as female characters. There is a need for more picture story books, written for girls between the ages of six and ten, showing the main character as a female participating in organized team sports with other girls.

Personal interests and book characteristics are two main factors in determining what children select to read (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). Children can learn valuable life lessons from the characters in story books and carry those lessons with them throughout their childhood. Many of the characters in these books become

examples or role models for children. Children need positive role models in their lives to help them through many of the obstacles they face at home and at school. If athletics is the avenue of choice for a young girl's energy in elementary school, she should be able to find literature to relate to her interests. The lack of literature for young athletic girls may very well discourage them from participating in sports. It is important for girls to learn that playing sports makes them strong and healthy as well as builds character and valuable life skills for their futures.

Problem Statement

There are very few children's picture story books, depicting female athletes participating in organized team sports other than gymnastics, dance, and skating that have been published in the United States in the past ten years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to create a children's picture storybook about young female athletes participating in organized athletics.

Research Questions

The following questions were evaluated during the development of this research project.

1. How will the illustrations in this project make the story come to life?
2. How will children ages 6-10 identify with the characters in the story?
3. Does the plot of the story speak to the intended audience of girls ages 6-10?
4. What is the primary underlying theme of this picture book?
5. Will the setting of the story be revealed primarily through text, pictures or a balance of both?

6. Is first-person narrative an effective style for this storyline?
7. How will the style and tone of this story resound with the intended audience?

Assumptions

1. Young girls want to read picture story books about female characters participating in organized team athletics.
2. The picture story book market has many books depicting male characters participating in organized team athletics.

Limitations

This book project was limited to the organized team sport of basketball. The project also limited the gender make up of the team to all female.

Definitions

Title IX: A law passed in 1972 prohibiting sex discrimination in federally assisted education programs. This includes every aspect of education from classrooms to athletics.

Organized Team Sport: “all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being, and social interaction. These include play, recreation, organized, casual, or competitive sport” (United Nations Inter-Agency on Sport for Development and Peace, 2008, p. 2).

Picture Story Book: “term to encompass children’s literature in which pictures and words are integrated into a book form that typically has 32 pages.” (Latrobe, Brodie, & White, 2002, p. 129).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Young girls need to see athletic female characters represented in picture story books. The following three related areas have been researched and the results will be discussed below: the impact of the passing of Title IX on girls' sports, the benefits of sports for children, and the misrepresentation of females in literature over time.

Impact of Title IX

In 1972 Congress passed the Title IX legislation mandating that females have equal opportunities to participate in athletics at all levels. In the thirty-six years since the issue was passed, girls and women have experienced the successes they deserve on and off the playing field: The following three studies discuss the impact that Title IX has had for females on and off the playing field.

Riley and Cantú (1997) compiled a report for the U.S. Government analyzing the progress of Title IX since its passing in 1972. The report focused on all aspects affected by Title IX giving women equal opportunity in the educational setting and beyond. They noted that women made considerable gains in the areas of schooling and athletics in the 25 years since it was passed.

Notably, Title IX has changed attitudes and behaviors: "Title IX has had a profound impact on helping to change attitudes, assumptions and behavior and consequently, our understanding about how sexual stereotypes can limit educational opportunities" (Riley & Cantú, 1997, p. 8). This report shows that females have increased their participation and interest in advanced mathematics courses at both the high school and collegiate level, with 68% taking algebra, 70% taking geometry, and

9% taking calculus at some point in high school. Females have also increased the number of biology and chemistry courses they enroll in during school.

At the collegiate level in 1994, the numbers of women earning associate's and master's degrees were increasing and surpassing the number of males earning the same degrees (Riley & Cantú). "At all levels, bachelor's, master's and doctoral, women's rates of receiving degrees have risen significantly in the fields of mathematical, physical, and biological sciences and engineering" (p. 12). These statistics show that Title IX has had a profound impact in the classroom for females.

At the time of the report, more than 100,000 women were participating in intercollegiate athletics. This showed a dramatic increase from the number of participants in 1971 (Riley & Cantú, 1997). An even greater increase was noted among high school female athletes from 300,000 in 1971 to 2.4 million in 1996. While Riley and Cantú celebrated the great strides achieved over the first 25 years of Title IX, they were cautious to warn that women were still facing great challenges in the workplace, and they suspected that this would continue until more steps would be taken to achieve equality between men and women.

Whisenant (2003) also studied the effects that Title IX has had on women since its passing. He studied the numbers of women involved with sports in an administrative role as opposed to participants and coaches. The researcher set out to find the answers to the following questions: a) to what extent did men dominate the administration of interscholastic athletics as shown by the gender composition of interscholastic athletic administrators within each state's athletic director associations, and b) to what extent did the gender make-up of state athletic director associations differ regionally across the

United States. An email was sent to the interscholastic athletic administrators association of each state. Demographic data were requested in order to learn the number of female members compared to male members. Responses were received from 26 states, 22 with data, and four states responded that no data were available.

Whisenant divided the United States into the following regions, West, Midwest, Great Lakes, Northeast, and Southeast, to see if the numbers reported were similar across the country.

The 22 states with data reported 7041 members served as interscholastic athletic administrators or athletic directors. The study reported that 87% of those members from across the country were male compared to only 13% female (Whisenant, 2003). When the data were examined regionally, the researcher found that male members greatly outnumbered female members by approximately 74%. The researcher concluded from these data that although girls were participating in athletics in large numbers, they were participating on teams and programs dominated by men. Whisenant believed that women, if given the opportunity to hold an administrative position, will not only serve as role models for both boys and girls, but also as examples that gender does not determine your level of success in those positions.

Miller, Heinrich, and Baker (2000) focused on the effect Title IX has had on females who chose to participate in athletics. Their study attempted to find the level of interest in sport by women at the college level. It was then determined if the college was in compliance with the Title IX legislation, and finally if the level of interest in sport expressed by the women was comparable to the level of interest in sport expressed by men at the same college. A sample of 116 female undergraduates completed the

Student Interests in Athletics, Sports and Physical Fitness Survey administered by the NCAA and participated in the voluntary study. Of the participants, 69% stated that they were extremely or somewhat interested in watching, attending, and keeping up with news about athletics. In addition, 81% of the female students expressed interest in participating in sports. The researchers then inquired about the students' high school participation in athletics and found that 41% of the students had participated in a high school varsity program while 36% participated in a non-varsity activity. These numbers represented a very high percentage of active female students at the collegiate level. Miller et al. found that the decrease in athletic participation among undergraduate females was due to an interference with studies, jobs, and family time.

Benefits of Sports

Experiences, both positive and negative, shape the way people choose to live. At a young age children observe adults around them and model their behaviors after them. Therefore, children need to be surrounded with positive role models and activities in their everyday lives. Children also need to participate in activities that build self-confidence. Sports offer a wide variety of life experiences from being a good winner and losing gracefully to working together as a team and succeeding on your own. The following research studies explore the benefits that sports can have for children.

Freyer (1997) carried out a study of adolescent females to gauge the impact of sports on their self-esteem and well-being. The 130 subjects were all female, and all were participants in team sports such as basketball, volleyball, and softball rather than individual sports. A research instrument was used to gather the responses of the

participants' answers to questions about whether they felt team sports involvement was the catalyst for positive outcomes in a number of domains. The researcher set up three distinct areas to study: a) the motives of adolescent female participation in sports, b) the perceived linkages between the sports experience and indices of well-being, and c) possible outcomes.

Freyer (1997) found that participating adolescent sportswomen attributed their motives for playing team sports to skill development, enjoyment of competition, and a desire to become physically fit. Other factors that did not rank high were enhancing appearance, gaining confidence, social status, academic commitment, and relationships with parents. The researcher noted that there was a high correlation between participants' perceptions of motives for participation and the desired outcomes among the participants. Freyer also noted that the adolescents' responses indicated that they did not initially join a sports team for the measured motives, but upon reflection, they recognized the numerous positive outcomes that resulted from belonging to the team. Next, the researcher asked the participants to rate their level of ability as a player, as well as their contributions to the team. The participants who rated themselves as having low ability also had the lowest recognition of the linkages between participation and outcomes. Those who felt that they had average ability saw more of the linkages between participation and outcomes. Once again an increase in the link between participation and outcomes was at a higher level with those adolescents who felt their ability level was high.

This study showed that there may be positive benefits for female adolescents who choose to participate in team sports (Freyer, 1997). The researcher saw

correlations between athletics and their levels of confidence and self-worth. It is her belief that, “adolescence is a time for achievement, skill testing, and expanding horizons” (p. 189). A team sport that is structured correctly has the potential to promote and encourage healthy levels of competition and higher levels of achievement for adolescent females.

In a similar study, Donaldson and Ronan (2006) interviewed 203 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 13 to see if participation in athletics created positive effects in their emotional well-being. The researchers tested the following hypotheses: “(a) an increased level of adolescent participation in sports will result in fewer behavior problems, and (b) an increased level of sports participation will result in increased perceptions of athletic, social, and physical competence” (p. 374). Each participant completed a three-part questionnaire including the Youth Self-Report, the Self-Perception Profile for Children, and an additional sports questionnaire. All of these instruments were considered to be reliable methods for gathering the information necessary for this study. The responses to the three questionnaires were used to conduct the preliminary and main analyses.

The results of this study showed a direct correlation between sports participation and the emotional well-being of young adolescents. Those who participated in athletics showed lower levels of social problems than those adolescents that did not participate in some type of athletics. If the adolescent felt that they were competent athletically, they experienced fewer emotional and behavioral problems (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006). Donaldson and Ronan also learned that among young adolescents, sport participation is associated with self-concept-related benefits. Those participants that were actively

engaged in athletics reported higher levels of global self-worth and social competence. The researchers concluded that sports for adolescents provide a positive option for youth with higher levels of self-concept.

Another important body of research when discussing youth sports is the selection of positive role models. Giuliano, Turner, Lundquist, and Knight (2007) did a study to show whether gender has an effect on a person's selection of public athletic role models. This study centered around three main goals: "to investigate the extent to which elite athletes are adopted as role models by admirers and how they are selected", "to determine the qualities that are desirable in public athletic role models according to both genders", and "to investigate the nature of athletic role model influence on sport-related choices" (pp. 4-7). The researchers randomly selected 75 females and 75 males attending a rowing event in Cambridge, Massachusetts to complete a questionnaire asking about experiences they have had with public athletic role models during childhood and the present. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 59, with a majority of ages in the 20s and 30s.

The first portion of the survey investigated which elite athletes are adopted as role models and how they are selected. The researchers were looking for the answers to three questions: (a) do males and females equally have public athletic role models?, (b) does age affect the tendency to have athletic role models?, and (c) when selecting athletic role models, do they tend to pick people of the same gender (Giuliano et al., 2007)? More than half of the participants (56%) answered that they had public athletic role models while growing up. When asked how many athletic role models they had, their answers varied between one and eight. Males tended to have more public athletic

role models than did females. It was also noted that the female participants reported that they had more female athletic role models than did the males during childhood. Males reported a greater number of male role models during childhood than female. In other words, when female athletic role models were available, women would favor them, and the men would favor male athletic role models over female. On the topic of most influential athletic role models, it was found that males exclusively identified males as their most influential athletic role models. Females were almost equal in the number of males and females selected as most influential.

The second part of the survey looked at the characteristics valued in athletic role models. It was determined that women preferred athletic role models that work hard, are good people, team leaders, self-confident, and able to balance personal and professional life well. Women are not as concerned with their role models having star qualities or their ability to dominate other players. Women were also less concerned about the gender of their preferred role models.

Men also felt that it was important for their role models be hard workers, team leaders, and generally good people. Men also value, though not as much, role models that are self-confident and able to balance personal and professional life. Men prefer role models that can dominate other players and have star qualities (Giuliano, et al.). The researchers further examined the answers to the questions pertaining to character qualities in athletic role models. They discovered that women were more concerned than men about a role model's ability to show good sportsmanship, conduct himself or herself positively off the field, remain humble about their success, and does not engage in illegal or immoral activities in their life. The researchers wanted to know if the

females' answers to this portion of the survey hinged on the number of female athletes available to them when they were growing up. It was noted that women's preference for a same-gender role model was directly related to the gender of their most influential athletic role model from childhood and from the present. This suggested that as time goes on and more female athletes are visible to the public, the more likely it will be for girls and young women to view a female athlete as their most influential role model in their lives (Guiliano, et al.).

The third portion of the research study was to determine if the athletic role models from the participants' childhood affected their participation in sports as they grew up. The research showed that women were influenced by female public athletic role models when they were likely to follow sports and had more access to female public role models. Men reported being influenced by athletic role models more frequently than women (Giuliano, et al., 2007). This portion of the study showed once again that at some level, women who had access to female athletic role models throughout their lives were influenced by them. It also determined that those participants who had a public athletic role model as a child were more likely to participate in athletics as they grew up.

The study by Giuliano, et al. (2007) is important because it sheds light on the impact of same-gendered athletic role models. The findings showed that when females had the opportunity to see public female athletes it impacted their choice of role models. Giving female athletes more media coverage broadens the pool of choices for young girls and women.

Misrepresentation of Females in Books

According to Jensen (2006), a child's first experience with literature most likely comes in the form of a picture storybook. Through these experiences with literature come opportunities for learning. Jensen states that "for greatest success, opportunities for learning must be grounded in actual experience, in the real lives of children" (p. 21). The authors of picture books have perfected the art of weaving a valuable message in every story. Books can be used as a source of comfort, a way to connect with all aspects of life, and an opportunity to live experiences instead of just knowing about them; "Children think about their feelings, thoughts and associations, as books are read to them" (p. 22).

Illustrations in picture books also play a vital role in how children interpret the story (Jensen, 2006). Illustrations serve as an extension of the text, and as children look closely at the illustrations they begin to "understand more fully the thoughts, needs and emotions of the characters as they responded to one another and to the particular problem or conflict confronting them" (p. 22). Illustrations help children to identify with the characters in the story allowing them to make comparisons to their own lives.

Research shows how picture books can help all children cope with everyday situations. Unfortunately gender representation in picture books continues to be an area of concern. McDonald (1989) studied children's picture books published between 1976 and 1987 to determine "whether treatment of the sexes had improved in children's picture books" (p. 392). McDonald conducted his research in three parts. First he wanted to compare the purpose and frequency of helping behaviors between male and

female characters. How many occurrences of males helping females, males helping males, females helping males, and females helping females and the motivations behind each instance. It was expected that the female characters would help in an expressive or emotionally motivated way and male character's behaviors would be instrumental or outcome motivated. The second focus of the study analyzed how male and female characters were distributed in central, primary, and secondary roles in the books. Central character's actions, experiences, and relationships have a direct impact on the story's progression or outcome. A primary character interacts with the central character throughout the story, but does not have a direct impact on the story line. A secondary character provides little input to the story line and is essentially part of the background. Finally McDonald assessed the frequency of male and female characters in traditional roles versus non-traditional roles.

McDonald (1989) selected a total of 41 children's picture books with publication dates between 1976 and 1987. Books that were considered for content analysis were included only if they were: (a) a picture book written for children in preschool, kindergarten, or those children just learning to read, (b) the book must tell a story, and (c) the book's publication date must fall within the yearly range selected.

The total number of characters recorded in this research was 187. Of those, 77 were female and the remaining 110 were male. Male characters outnumbered female characters in all central, primary and secondary roles within the books (McDonald, 1989).

The results of this study showed that in 99 helping events, 92 performed by characters defined as male or female, the male characters were shown 55 times

compared to females shown 37 times. It was also noted that male characters more often helped other males as opposed to helping females. In addition, male characters received more help than did females (McDonald, 1989).

When McDonald (1989) examined the occupations of the characters in the stories it was noted that women continue to be portrayed in traditional roles such as teachers, housewives, and princesses. Men on the other hand are given roles as kings or farmers. McDonald concluded that “children need to see opportunities and expectations that reflect a new reality, for many of the rigid boundaries that once defined the sexes are no longer valid” (p. 400).

Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, and Young (2006) conducted a study similar to McDonald’s. They analyzed 200 popular children’s picture books to see if there was gender stereotyping among characters and if there was an under-representation of females. They selected top selling books from 2001, as well as Caldecott award-winning books during a seven year time frame. The researchers looked at how each gender was represented in pictures and characters; behaviors of the characters, settings, personality, and if there was a comparison between the sex of the author and the character in the story.

The researchers examined “the relationship between the sex of the author and the sex of the title and main characters,” They began their study with several hypotheses they wished to explore: (a) “there would be fewer females represented in the stories as children, adults, title characters, main characters, as well as in pictures and illustrations,” (b) “the role of the female character would more often be described as indoors, and their behaviors would be passive, nurturing, and as someone in need of

rescue,” (c) “the occupations of the predominant male and female characters would be gender traditional and more females than males would be portrayed as not having a job outside the home” and (d) “Caldecott winners and those books that have not won awards would have differences in the numbers of male and female characters at all levels” (Hamilton, et al., 2006, p. 759-760).

The study began with the 30 winners of the Caldecott Medal from 1995-2001. In order for the researchers to broaden their sample, they located 155 best-selling children’s books in 1995-2001 according to the *New York Times*, Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, and *Publishers Weekly*. In addition, nine best-selling Little Golden Books were included in the study.

The information collected for this research included each book’s title, year of publication, and author. Other items included frequency counts, classifications, and fill-in-the-blanks. The researchers counted and compared the numbers of female and male characters as title characters, main characters, and supporting characters. The illustrations were also examined to determine the number of females and males represented in each. It was determined that when counting characters, they could be represented as human, animal, or other (plants, robots, etc.) (Hamilton, et al., 2006).

The data for the study were coded and analyzed with the following results. Of the 200 picture books included in the study, 75 contained a male title character, nearly twice as many as the 42 female title characters counted. Similar results were noted in the area of main characters where 95 males outnumbered the 52 females (Hamilton, et al., 2006). When the age of characters was examined, it was found that nearly twice as many adult characters were male versus female. The one area where the numbers were

closer was child characters where male child characters appeared 24% more often than females. The analysis of pictures showed that males were depicted in 53% more pictures than females. When the characters were represented as animals, or other gender-neutral objects, it was found that they were almost always referred to as males.

The researchers also found that occupational stereotyping is still a prevalent occurrence in picture books. This study showed that men were shown as having a traditional job more than nine times as often as they were shown in a non-traditional job and women had traditional jobs more than ten times as often as non-traditional. The most common occupations for female characters were teacher, stewardess, librarian, maid, nanny, nurse, dancer, and quilter (Hamilton et al., 2006). Men were often shown working outside of the home whereas women were more likely depicted working in the home once again reinforcing the stereotypical views on each gender.

Hamilton, et al. (2006) concluded that, "Modern children's picture books continue to provide nightly reinforcement of the idea that boys and men are more interesting and important than are girls and women" (p. 764). This study showed that children's literature had not been keeping up with the shift in gender viewpoints. Parents and teachers continually tell children that they can be anything they aspire to be when they grow up, this belief is not reflected in children's literature.

A study done by Stark (2006) evaluated the portrayal of female characters specifically in sports fiction for teenagers and young adults. In her study, Stark used content analysis to determine if certain words or concepts within the text would suggest an image of female athletes. Other factors that were included in the research were the presence of female characters and their role within the story, the author's descriptions of

the female characters, and if there were lessons or messages contained within the text of the story.

The research was based on sixteen sports fiction books written for young adults and adolescents (Stark, 2006). All books were written in the United States, and most were written after 1990. In order to have data for comparison, some books published from 1972 to 1990 were included. The importance of these dates centered on the passing of the Title IX legislation. Stark wanted to examine if there was an effect on sports fiction after the law was passed.

The data gathering instrument included four sections to evaluate each item. The first section recorded the book title, sport represented, proportion of male and female characters, and if the character was in a main role, supporting, or both. The second section focused on the personal traits of the characters. Lists of stereotypical descriptive words were used as examples to compare to words used in the stories. Next, a series of yes/no questions were used to examine issues, problems, and relationships presented within each book. A summary of each book was written by the evaluator to complete the instrument (Stark, 2006). After reading each of the books and analyzing it according to the data gathering instrument, Stark sorted the results according to copyright date, individual sport or team sport, and the male/female portrayal of the characters.

Stark believed that more than 50% of the books analyzed would show girls participating in athletics for social purposes rather than competitiveness. The study showed that in twelve of the sixteen books, the reasons behind female sports participation were related to choices of friends, boyfriends, or simple desire to play the

game. Four of the books showed the evolution of the athlete into a more competitive participant because the athlete desired to win (Stark, 2006). The data gathered in the study supported Stark's hypotheses that, "the majority of books available include females on teams but who are participants for reasons other than a true desire to compete to win" (p. 52).

The second hypothesis stated that in more than 50% of the books analyzed, the female athletic characters would have feminine and weak characteristics rather than aggressive and assertive especially in the presence of male characters (Stark, 2006). The results were that male characters outnumbered female characters in ten of the sixteen books. Six books showed a lone female attempting to earn and keep a position of a team dominated by males. Eight of the books depicted the females as weak, feminine characters. The other eight depicted the females as having assertive and aggressive characteristics. In these instances it was felt that the females were shown as a threat to the male characters in the story. The data collected for this portion of the study did not support the hypothesis, though the percentage was an even split.

Stark's (2006) third and final hypothesis predicted that more than 50% of the books analyzed would show the female athlete as having some type of social issue. These issues included gender issues, body-image, relationship problems, or social role. Stark found that gender issues were prevalent in the story line of 15 out of 16 books. Eleven of these books showed the female character having issues with body image in both healthy and unhealthy ways. Many of the issues were internal struggles with height, weight, and coordination. Female athletes were only respected and revered by

the community and school in six of the sixteen books evaluated. These statistics overwhelmingly supported this hypothesis.

All three of the previous studies focused on the portrayal of female characters in books written for children. Each study came to a similar conclusion, that females are misrepresented in terms of numbers and portrayals.

Summary

Research has shown that children identify with and learn from characters in picture books (Jensen, 2006). Unfortunately history has shown that picture books are typically dominated by male characters in central, primary, and secondary roles. Male characters have broader experiences in occupations and activities including athletics than female characters (McDonald, 1987).

Riley & Cantú (1997) showed that girls today have more opportunities to play sports than previous generations thanks to the passing of Title IX. Through sports, girls can gain self-confidence, build friendships, achieve academic success, and learn to live a healthy lifestyle (Freyer, 1997). Another positive outcome for female athletes is the increase of role models and their visibility through mainstream media (Guiliano et al., 2007). Girls have experiences with athletics beginning at a young age through physical education classes and community sports programs. They should also have the opportunity to find a picture book relating to their athletic interests that shows how a girl can compete with other girls and be successful.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

Girls today have more opportunities to participate in all kinds of sports. Title IX opened the door for female athletes to look beyond the world of ice skating, gymnastics, and dance into more competitive team sports such as basketball, softball, volleyball, and soccer. Books are an important form of media that can introduce young girls to the world of athletics through positive character models. When a child is first learning to read, picture books become an important part of his or her life. There are not enough picture storybooks with female athletic characters available for children today.

Description of Project

The researcher created a picture story book for children between the ages of six and ten. The finished book is 32 pages in length with color illustrations that complement the text. The dimensions of the book are approximately 11" x 8 ½" with horizontal formatting. The genre for this picture book is realistic fiction with a sports emphasis.

In Lukens' (2007) *Critical Handbook for Children's Literature*, the following story elements are identified as essential components by which to evaluate children's literature: illustrations, character, plot, theme, setting, point of view, style and tone. Therefore these elements were considered by the researcher during the development of this research project and are discussed in greater depth in the following paragraphs.

Illustrations

"The illustrator puts into visual form what the words say, or sometimes what they merely suggest" (Lukens, 2007, p. 44). The illustrations for this research project

were hand drawn and colored using colored pencils. The pictures complemented the text and give greater detail to the story by depicting the setting and portraying the characters. Illustrations appear opposite each page of text.

Character

As a character is introduced in the story, the reader becomes familiar with the way a character looks, acts, speaks, and their thoughts and feelings (Lukens, 2007). Therefore it was important for the primary characters to be described in great detail.

The main character in this story is a ten-year-old girl. She is very interested in athletics as the result of watching her older sister compete on the local varsity team. The main character idolizes her older sister and emulates the way she styles her hair, clothing styles, and her choice of activities in which to participate. Through the story the main character comes to realize that she has her own identity, and she learns to embrace her strengths and abilities in all aspects of her life.

Secondary characters in this story included the older sister who is realizing that she is a role model for her younger sister and embraces the new responsibility by encouraging her through her struggles. The main character's mother provides support and encouragement throughout the story. The youth basketball coach and other youth basketball players play a minor supporting role in the story.

Plot

The plot of a story should be written to sustain reader interest (Lukens, 2007). The plot of this story centers on the main character's journey to realize her dream of becoming a competitive basketball player.

The main character in the story celebrates her tenth birthday with family and friends but her birthday means more than just presents and cake. She is really looking forward to joining the basketball team at the local youth center. After watching her older sister work hard to become the star of her high school basketball team, the main character is disappointed and discouraged at her lack of success and contemplates quitting the game altogether. Through encouragement from her family, friends, and coach she learns that everyone on a team plays an important role and that success takes hard work and determination. While her role may not be as the team's star, her contributions help the team win the game. In the end, it is the older sister who becomes the main character's biggest fan.

Theme

The theme of a story is "the idea that holds the story together" (Lukens, 2007, p.135). The main theme of this project is that success comes from hard work and determination. There are many underlying themes running throughout the story. The goal of the researcher was to create a story that can be used to teach children valuable character building, life-lessons.

Setting

The setting of a story is where the action takes place. For this project there are two main settings that impact the events of the story. When the characters are described playing basketball, the setting is inside a gymnasium. The other setting for this story is at the main character's home, most frequently in her bedroom where she does most of her reflecting on her day and where she watches her older sister practice basketball outside her window.

Point of View

Point of view is “the mind through which the writer chooses to tell the story” (Lukens, 2007, p. 57). For this project the story is told from the main character’s point of view providing readers with an insight to her thoughts, emotions, and relationship with her sister.

Style & Tone

Lukens (2007) states that “style at its best increases not only our pleasure in words and sounds, but also our belief in the characters’ reality” (p. 196). The most common element of style for this project is the use of imagery when describing the events of the story. Character feelings and emotions are described in detail so the reader can form a deep connection with the story.

The style also conveys tone in literature through sentence structure, word choice, patterns and arrangements. This story was written with the intended audience of six to ten year olds but is not condescending in tone. While the events of the story are happening to the main character, a ten year old girl, the text relates to multiple ages through descriptions and illustrations.

Project Evaluation Plan

Project evaluation for the book created in this research project took the following steps:

1. Read and discussed the book with several female students between the targeted ages of six and ten. Gathered information regarding the appropriateness of text and illustrations.
2. Noted observations about student reactions to the book and noted possible edits.

3. Asked other educators and community members with expertise in writing for children to read the book and evaluate the grammar and writing mechanics to ensure the book is age-appropriate. The feedback collected from all evaluations was used in editing and finalizing the book.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH PROJECT

The researcher's book project, *That's My Sister*, by Lisa Heiden, is bound separately. The researcher created a realistic fiction picture book about female athletes participating in a competitive team sport with other females.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this project was to create a children's picture storybook depicting female characters participating in competitive team athletics. The researcher has a long history of athletic participation and a deep passion for sports. These experiences allowed the researcher to capture the essence of the sport of basketball and create a picture book for children that engages the reader and possibly encourages participation in athletics for children of various ages.

Reflections

During the process of writing the storybook, the researcher considered the story elements that were examined in *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature* (Lukens, 2007). These elements include: illustrations, characters, plot, theme, setting, point of view, style & tone. Each element was constructed around the intended audience of 6 to 12 year old girls. A narrative text structure was selected for writing the children's book because the purpose of the story is to entertain the reader.

The process of drawing the illustrations was very difficult. The purpose of the illustrations was to compliment the text but not take away from the story. In the beginning it was hoped that the illustrations could be colored using water color paints, however, after several attempts the researcher realized that water colors were not an art medium that she was comfortable working with. It was then decided that colored pencil would be the best fit for the illustrations. The colored pencils provided some texture and depth to the drawings. The younger children that listened to the story enjoyed the

illustrations and thought they “showed what was happening in the story.” Older children commented that the illustrations were nice but they would be better if they were brighter colors and more “cartoon-like.”

The researcher set out to write a story about sports that would interest girls, fulfilling a desire to write a story about the experience of growing up with an older sister who excelled at sports. The main character narrates the story and reflects the author at age twelve and my older sister at age sixteen. The choice was made to keep the character’s real names in the story to reflect the personal connection the researcher has to the story.

The plot for this story changed many times during the creation of the book. The researcher knew she wanted the story to show how a younger sister could succeed outside the shadow of an older sibling. In the first few drafts the younger sister showed some elements of jealousy towards the older sister but it was decided that the researcher didn’t want to associate those negative emotions with the positive ending of the story. In early drafts the older sister didn’t play a large role in the story other than at the end. The addition of the older sister’s retelling of her first experiences with basketball added a great deal to the plot of the story. After adding that element the rest of the story fell into place easily.

There are several themes that run throughout this book and make it a useful teaching tool. Readers with different backgrounds will interpret these themes differently. Some of the reactions from the children who listened to the story included, “I liked when the girl worked hard and got better in the end,” “I’m glad the big sister came to watch the game,” and “I think the sisters are best friends.” Overall the

researcher wanted the story to reflect the admiration a younger sister has for an older sister.

It was important that the settings in the story reflected both the experiences on the basketball court but also interactions at the characters' home. The researcher chose to limit the number of setting changes in order to make sure that the main storyline didn't get lost. If this were to be a book written for older children, such as a short chapter book, then it would be acceptable to add more detail about the changes in setting.

The final project was shared with several audiences comprised of various ages, backgrounds, and interests. The researcher initially considered sharing the book with only girls to gauge the impact of the story on their thoughts and feelings about athletics. It was later decided to also share the book with boys to see if they took anything away from the text.

The overall reaction to the story was positive. Children of all ages and both boys and girls felt the story was well written. The researcher was surprised that the story kept the attention of the boys because the story was only about girls. When asked, the boys said they liked the story because it was about sports and that it interested them no matter who the characters were. Many of the students noted that they made personal connections with the story. The connections included: the relationship between siblings, athletic abilities, starting something new, and having the feeling that you want to quit something. Both girls and boys noted that the story was more interesting if they were interested in sports but you don't have to like sports to like the book.

Many of the adults that read the book also made references to personal connections to the story. This leads the researcher to believe that if published, this book could potentially reach beyond the intended audience.

Recommendations

Initially the purpose of this project was to fill a need for picture storybooks depicting female athletes participating in competitive team sports. This project developed into a story that the researcher believes could be used in many educational formats. This book easily lends itself to discussions of teamwork, support and effort. Numerous character building activities and lessons could be taught using the issues from this story. It would be recommend that future researchers look for the potential benefits of a series of books written for young female athletes and their participation in organized team sports.

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