

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses developmental disabilities as a topic in children's literature. The basic concepts related to developmental disabilities found in picture books are presented. Several picture books are observed, i.e. several disabilities (blindness, stuttering, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities). There is a research part in the paper whose aim, based on the results of a survey, is to examine whether the respondents (children) were previously familiar with the picture books that talk about the title topic (developmental disabilities), the degree of their identification with the character, whether their concepts of the developmental disabilities overlap with their assumptions about the health problem prior to their reading the text and the usefulness of information on developmental disabilities obtained from picture books. Research results confirm the validity of the assumption that children are not yet familiar with this type of *Otherness*. Based on the results of the survey, it was observed whether the respondents were familiar with picture books that talk about developmental disabilities. The results of the research show that they are unfamiliar with them, but also that there is considerable usefulness of the information about the disabilities that the respondents received from the literary text.

Key words: children's literature, research, picture book, developmental disabilities, legal acts



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RESEARCHING TEXTS ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THEIR APPLICATION IN PRACTICE¹

*Fejlődési visszamaradásról szóló gyermekirodalmi szö-
vegek tanulmányozása, és az eredmények gyakorlati
alkalmazása*

*Proučavanje tekstova dečije književnosti o zaostajanju u
razvoju i praktična primena rezultata*

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Introduction

The Croatian Register of Persons with Disabilities Act (OG 64/01) distinguishes between eleven groups of developmental disabilities. These are the impairments of: vision, hearing, speech-voice communication, locomotor system, central nervous system, peripheral nervous system, other organs and organ systems (respiratory, circulatory, digestive, endocrine, skin and subcutaneous tissue and urogenital), mental retardation, autism, mental disorders and several types of impairments. *Disability, special needs* or *developmental disabilities* are terms used on a daily basis in formal and informal communication, numerous documents and legal provisions, and scientific and professional literature. Although seemingly the same or similar, there are certain semantic differences between them that can be observed in different legal acts.

About 10% of the total population of children are disabled, most of whom live in developing countries, are born with a disability or are disabled during childhood (Lansdown, 2011). General socio-demographic data of the Republic of Croatia, from the beginning of 2017, show that about 12% of persons with disabilities and 8% of children with disabilities live in the Republic of Croatia (Benjak, 2017).

People with disabilities and children with disabilities were not recognized until the end of the 20th century as vulnerable groups in society that require more attention, so they are receiving more and more attention in literature. In literature for children and young people, as a consequence of the lack of research, there is no systematic corpus of works that thematize developmental disabilities. For the purpose of the paper, and in accord-

ance with the current division of types of developmental disabilities, five picture books were selected that thematize five types of developmental disabilities. The titles researched are: *Djevojčica i knjiga* (*The Girl and the Book*), *Mucka* (*Stutter Girl*), *Osmijeh moje sestree* (*My Sister's Smile*), *Priča o Vedranu* (*The Story of Vedran*), *Moj veliki brat Matija* (*My Big Brother Matija*), i.e. blindness, stuttering, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities and attention deficit disorder as developmental disabilities.

Contemporary picture book is a book that is essentially determined by double visual-verbal discourse, three-dimensionality, interactivity, specific readership and a relatively small number of pages. (Narančić Kovač, 2015) According to Narančić Kovač, since a narrative picture book is closely related to narrative literature, theoretical research of picture books belongs to the field of contemporary intermedial and interdisciplinary narratology. It cannot be denied that the contemporary theoretical literature on picture books provided basic insights into the problems of narrators and narrative perspectives, and that this topic decisively directed theorists towards the methodology of narrative theory, as well as the fact that many important questions have been opened, says Narančić Kovač (2015). Since the topic of this research is a reference to models that deal with developmental disabilities, it deals with their recognition and a pointing at the problem (and not by going into narrative perspectives and characteristics). The attention of the picture book reader is focused on both discourses, verbal-visual, and both are present, sequential and essential for understanding the story that the picture book mediates. In this context, the research is focused on the verbal (*the story*).

1. Developmental disabilities in picture books

The picture book *Djevojčica i knjiga* (*The Girl and the Book*) by Ana Paula Jelić (2010) deals with visual impairment, more precisely blindness as a form of visual impairment. Ivana, the protagonist of the picture book, is a blind girl who moves independently with the help of a white cane, as Fajdetić says about it: a visible and functional aid for blind and highly visually impaired people (Fajdetić, 2015), and wearing dark-black glasses. The emphasis is on the problem of written communication of blind people, i.e. reading and the availability and adaptation of books. The opposition between visually impaired people, who have a wealth of literature at their disposal, and the blind, who can only read books written in Braille, is shown. Ivana has only one such book available in the library: "She had read it countless times, but she always came again because it was the only book she could read, apart from school textbooks." (Jelić, 2010). In addition to a realistic depiction of the problems encountered by blind people, the author inserts a fantastic motif into the picture book. Namely, after the books in the library come to life at night, the colorful books borrowed by many children mock the brown, thick and big book that only Ivana borrows. "It was a small consolation for her that she knew that other books didn't like it because they

didn't know what was written in it and because it was different. Just as her Ivana was different." (Jelić, 2010). It should be noted that the library, as the only place of action, has a special function. It is Ivana's refuge (as is to Bozo, the obese boy). In relation to the depiction of the social acceptance of the blind person, the picture book *The Girl and the Book* shows the loneliness and exclusion of the blind girl from the society of her peers.

The picture book *Mucka (The Stutter Girl)* by Sanja Pribić (2004) deals with a difficulty that belongs to the group of impairments of language-speech-voice communication - stuttering. Stuttering is a syndrome of numerous manifestations in the speech, language, psychological, physiological, physical and social areas (Sardelić, 2003). Specifically, stuttering is non-standard speech behavior expressed by the repetition of sounds, syllables, words and sentences, prolongation of voices, pauses and interruptions in speech, inadequate pauses, bursting or explosive beginning of speech, adding different voices and gestures, longer speech duration, etc. (Sardelić, 2003; Zrilić, 2011). Stuttering occurs in both children and adults, but research shows that about 95% of all stuttering begins by the age of seven (Sardelić, 2003), i.e. in preschool age.

The main character in the picture book *Mucka* is six-year-old Lara, a girl in kindergarten, about to enroll in the first grade. Lara's stuttering is realized as a repetition of sounds and syllables at the beginning of words: tttt-amo, ha-ha-halo, ddddoobar d-dan (Pribić, 2004, 4-8), which is also one of the most common symptoms of stuttering (Sardelić, 2003). The title of the picture book refers to Lara's nickname in kindergarten, which is the result of mocking her stuttering: "*Lara stutters, Lara stutters, Lara is - a stutter girl! Stutter Girl, stutter girl, stutter girl ... - Luka, Sven and Nikola make fun of her. That is how Lara became a Mucka in kindergarten.*" (Pribić, 2004, 6) In this way, the author emphasizes that people who stutter often encounter a lack of understanding of the environment. Negative reactions of peers affect Lara's behavior, which becomes insecure and timid, and when a child becomes aware that something is wrong with her speech, then she begins to avoid speech in certain speech situations (Sardelić, 2003). By developing a fear of speech, Lara narrows the circle of people she communicates with and eventually withdraws into herself: "*Soon Lara stopped talking to her family. She nodded and shook her head instead of answering. (...) She did not want to go to the store. Not even for ice cream. She didn't want to go to Iva's birthday. Neither Petra's, Vedran's, Maja's or Roko's. She did not greet the neighbors. She no longer talked to the pet parrot Viki.*" (Pribić, 2004, 10-12). As for avoiding speech situations, Onslow (2016) systematized research that sought to determine which situations are most often avoided by people who stutter. The results indicate that stutterers most often avoid telephone conversations (Trotter and Bergmann, 1957; Vanryckeghem et al., 2017, 2018; James et al., 1999, according to Onslow, 2016), which is also shown in Lara's case: "*She wouldn't answer the phone anymore, although she had known for a long time how it was done.*" (Pribić, 2004, 8). Possible reasons for avoiding telephone conversations include lack of nonverbal communication, unknown reactions of the interlocutor to stuttering, lack of understanding of the interlocutor and pressure that occurs in a person who stutters

for fear of not having enough time (Onslow, 2016), which is again evident in Lara's case: "*Lara, Dad wants to talk to you - Mom would say. - Quick, quick, he has not much time! If he has no time, he will not want to listen to my stuttering, Lara would think.*" (Pribić, 2004, 8)

Prolonged backlash of stuttering affects the formation of character traits of the person who stutters, often the negative ones (Sardelić, 2003). Therefore, a timely visit to a speech therapist, an expert in impaired language-speech-voice communication, is extremely important. The seriousness of Lara's situation is also noticed by her family, who decide to find a solution and help her. With the help of speech therapy exercises and advice, Lara eventually stops stuttering, and such an end of the picture book corresponds to the results of modern research which confirms that most children, about 70%, overcome stuttering with little or no therapy (Zrilić, 2011). In addition, less than 1% of adults stutter, which also indicates the effectiveness of speech therapy exercises (Zrilić, 2011). By determining the thematic layer of the picture book, not only the communication but also the emotional and social problems encountered by the stuttering child are recognized.

At the center of the picture book *Osmijeh moje sestre* (*The Smile of My Sister*) by Sonja Jurić (2016) is ten-year-old Ana, who suffers from cerebral palsy. It is a damage to the central nervous system (Zrilić, 2011), where the word *cerebral* refers to the brain, and the word *palsy* (*paralysis*) to the inability of a person to use muscles in the normal way (Kostelnik et al., 2004). Impairments can be of varying degrees, from a minimal degree that is barely recognizable to severe damage that allows a child to control their body to a very small extent (Kostelnik et al., 2004). It should be noted that children with cerebral palsy rank third in terms of representation in the population of children with disabilities (Bouillet, 2014).

Ana's level of cerebral palsy prevents her from moving and controlling her body, which is why she needs numerous aids such as wheelchairs, stands, bath accessories, and car seats. As cerebral palsy is accompanied by additional disabilities (Zrilić, 2011), Ana also suffers from epilepsy and frequent pneumonia. Ana's life with cerebral palsy is learned from the perspective of her younger sister Gabriela, and the emphasis in the picture book is on her position in the family and feelings related to her sister's condition. Namely, Gabriela feels neglected because her parents direct all their attention to Ana: "*I thought she was to blame because I was deprived of all my mother's and father's love, walks, games, travel, hugs ...*" (Jurić, 2016, 55) Her loneliness, associated with anger and sadness, is especially emphasized: "*In everything, just everything, I am alone: I study and do homework on my own, I go to school alone, I sleep alone in my room. Sometimes it seems to me that I am the loneliest child in the whole world.*" (Jurić, 2016, 59) The author, however, decides on a happier outcome of the story, so that all family members are satisfied. Namely, the opening of a home for children with disabilities means daily therapies for Ana and partial improvement of her condition (calmer sleep, less frequent epileptic seizures), as well as less worry for her parents and more frequent socializing of Gabrijela with them: "*Everything has become more beautiful in to our house: mom was more rested and would spend more time with me, dad was happier and would rest when he got back from work. Ana also looked*

much better. ”(Jurić, 2016, 63). The picture book presents a significant change in family dynamics caused by a child with cerebral palsy. The author also brings the sisters closer, Gabriela ultimately understands her sister's condition and needs.

Cila Baričević (2016) in the picture book *Priča o Vedranu* (*The Story of Vedran*) thematizes intellectual disabilities in very simple language, which, according to Zrilić, implies below-average intellectual functioning and a simultaneous deficit in adaptive behavior, i.e. communication, self-care, social skills, self-activity, etc. (Zrilić, 2011). Simplicity of language is important for *The Story of Vedran*. The level of language is a key shaper of infantile consciousness and its relations with the environment, just as it is for the *Zaboravljeni sin ili Anđeo iz Omorine* (*Forgotten Son or Angel from Omorina*) by Miro Gavran (Dragun, 2016).

The protagonist is twenty-five-year-old Vedran, a young man and not a child, age wise. However, the level of intellectual functioning defines him as a child: “*Vedran is only a young man who has already grown up in body: he weighs close to seventy kilograms and is over one hundred and seventy centimeters tall. But he knows and understands as much as a three-year-old child could know and understand.*” (Baričević, 2016) Due to intellectual disabilities in learning and adaptive behavior, people need constant help from the environment (International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 2012), as well as Vedran does. The picture book emphasizes the joyfulness of a child with severe intellectual disabilities (isn't the name a sign!? Vedran= Joyful): “*A friend told him:” Vedran, if you didn't have ears, a smile would stretch around your head.*” (Baričević, 2016) A good naturedness of a child with severe intellectual disabilities is gradually transferred to a picture of the beauty of his soul and empathetic nature: “*At one of the following stops an elderly gentleman enters the tram. Vedran quickly takes the bag and with his wide warm smile invites him to sit down. And his smile is returned. Joy shines from their faces.*” (Baričević, 2016) However, the author decides to present a realistic picture of society's attitude towards a child with intellectual disabilities, which sometimes implies non-acceptance and rejection: “*Sometimes, as he walks through the city streets, some ugly shouts and insulting laughter echo behind him. He then turns to his mother, and she, helpless, tries to comfort him by urging him to move away from those who mock him as soon as possible. Vedran's eyes are then full of tears, he helplessly clenches his fists, realizing that he is not like others.*” (Baričević, 2016) Namely, children with intellectual disabilities belong to the risk population that is very exposed to violence. Research by Josipović, Najman Hižman and Leutar (2008) shows that the largest number of people with intellectual disabilities were victims of verbal violence, implying derogatory teasing, ridicule and swearing, which is exactly the case in the event that the author decides to present.

As it is a problem picture book, at the end there are instructions and questions for interpretation, as well as the thoughts of children who, like the main character, have intellectual disabilities. The questions for interpretation are designed to further encourage the young reader to think and put herself in the position of another, a different one: *Why*

do you think some children mock Vedran? How do you feel when someone makes fun of you? What is Vedran good at? What are you good at? Do you know anyone like Vedran? (Baričević, 2016). In addition to actualizing the topic of intellectual disabilities with these issues, it facilitates interpretation.

Behind the title of the picture book *Moj veliki brat Matija* (*My Big Brother Matija*) Anja Freudiger (2016) is a boy who shows attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It is a developmental disorder that is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity as three key behaviors or symptoms (Kudek Mirošević and Opić, 2010). In order for ADHD to be diagnosed, a child must have pronounced symptoms for six months or more, and they must be represented to a greater extent than in the behaviors of other children of the same age (Kudek Mirošević and Opić, 2010). Also, a child with ADHD does not necessarily have to have all three of these behaviors at the same time, so there are generally three subtypes of the disorder, depending on which behavior is most pronounced: predominantly hyperactive - impulsive type, predominantly inattentive type and combined type (Zrilić, 2011).

Due to the inability to maintain attention and concentration, such children find it very difficult to learn, do not follow instructions and do not finish what they started, do not pay attention to details, etc., which is reflected in their school and social skills (Zrilić, 2011). They often remain unidentified due to the unobtrusiveness of their disorders, which is why parents and teachers often do not notice that it is ADHD (Kudek Mirošević and Opić, 2010; Zrilić, 2011). Zrilić states, among other things, the importance of a positive and benevolent attitude towards the child and praise for the effort that the child invests in a particular task (Zrilić, 2011).

Matija, the protagonist of the picture book *My Big Brother Matija*, in addition to attention deficit disorder, also shows hyperactivity and impulsivity, so it can be said that he belongs to the combined type (Zrilić, 2011). ADHD is explained from the perspective of Matija's younger brother Julije, and the emphasis is on describing the daily behaviors of a child with a combined type of ADHD in a family and school setting, as well as on diagnosing the disorder. Already the first pages of the picture book reveal that Matija is different from other children, and Julije points out that he cannot be compared to anyone. Due to difficulties in predicting the consequences for certain behaviors, children with ADHD are often fearless and persist in situations that frighten other children (Kudek Mirošević and Opić, 2010), and he is just like that - a boy who does not know fear: "*Matija is the bravest guy I know! He jumps from very tall buildings. Or he descends by scooter down a terribly steep hill and is not afraid of it at all. And when one of the adults warns him about something, he simply scolds him.*" (Freudiger, 2016) In addition, impulsiveness, i.e. reacting without thinking about the possible consequences of behavior (Zrilić, 2011), creates numerous problems for Matija and his family. Although he never intended to hurt others or do harm, his behavior often results in this: "*Last week, while my mom was telling us a very funny story, he laughed so hard that he overturned the TV. Mom said it was sooo lucky*

that I quickly jumped to the side. Otherwise it could have been anything. Yes, and she said that Matija just doesn't pay enough attention." (Freudiger, 2016) In general, parents of careless, hyperactive and impulsive children must be constantly vigilant to prevent accidents and injuries to which these children are prone, and the furniture itself can be threatening to these children (Zrilić, 2011). The picture book shows some other behaviors typical of children like Matija, such as emotional instability, low tolerance for frustrations, frequent outbursts of anger and excessive sensitivity to criticism (Zrilić, 2011): "Of course, each of us sometimes cries. Each of us is angry at times. I know that. But I realized that with Matija, all this is somehow much stronger than with me: both when he is angry or sad, but also when he is happy." (Freudiger, 2016). Matija has problems at school because of his behavior, and the picture book lists the usual indicators of ADHD in students, which the teacher still associates with indiscipline and disobedience: "Matija says that the teacher constantly complains about him: he still counts on his fingers, does not write neatly in a notebook, always covers everything up." (Freudiger, 2016), which suggests the problem of the school system and insufficient education of teachers. ADHD is most often diagnosed during the school period, when a child is unable to meet school requirements and rules due to characteristic behaviors, such as Matija's (Zrilić, 2011). The author decides to present this situation, so after the complete characterization of Matija as a boy with ADHD, there is a positive decision and reaction of the mother, who seeks the help of a psychologist whose role is explained simply: "A psychologist is someone who can help us how deal with our feelings. Especially when those terrible feelings like sadness and anger are so horrible that no child can stand it." (Freudiger, 2016) Thus, a psychologist enters Matija's life and gives him and the whole family an explanation for his unusual behavior. The definition of ADHD is again vividly explained: "My mother explained to me that ADHD is an abbreviated name for attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder. She said that in the brain, every man has messengers who constantly run between nerve cells and carry information. Like postmen with letters and packages from one place to another." (Freudiger, 2016) This unfolding of the picture book emphasizes the importance of timely diagnosis of ADHD in children, so that therapeutic or counseling work can begin with the child and parents, but also with teachers. (Zrilić, 2011)

2. Reception of picture books about developmental disabilities

2.1. Field research - a research draft

A field research was designed on a sample of children - students from the third to the sixth grade of primary school, on the basis of which an attempt was made to examine how well they know previously rendered picture books that deal with developmental disabilities. What we wanted to examine, in addition to knowledge of picture books, is the degree of understanding of the character and his problems, i.e. the disease itself, and the

assessment of the usefulness of information about developmental disabilities obtained by reading picture books. The research is intended for two groups - the primary school group of lower and higher grades, and to them as an age group sometimes inappropriate age of the protagonist was not crucial, for example in kindergarten student Lara (*Mucka*) or twenty-five-year-old Vedran (*The Story of Vedran*). In some picture books, however, the age of the protagonist coincides with the age of the respondents, such as ten-year-olds Ana (*My Sister's Smile*) and Matija (*My Big Brother Matija*).

2.2. Description of samples

Data collection was undertaken by the face-to-face technique with the examiner present, in the second semester of the school year 2020/2021. The research included one hundred respondents, students from two primary schools. The results were analyzed in the SPSS program. The study analyzed three key variables of differentiation: age, gender category, and self-assessment of reading interest.

Table 1. Description of the sample by data collection points and number of respondents

	School	Number of respondents	%
Respondents	Elementary School Ljudevit Gaj, District School Sarvaš	50	50,00%
	Elementary School Josipovac, Josipovac	50	50,00%
	Total	100	100,00%

Data were collected in Osijek-Baranja County, in the elementary school *Ljudevit Gaj* in Osijek and regional elementary school Sarvaš and Josipovac in Josipovac. It can be seen from Table 1 that the research was evenly distributed among two groups of respondents in two schools. Fifty respondents (50.00%) participated in the first survey (conducted in the third and fourth grades of primary school), and one hundred respondents (50.00%) participated in the second (conducted in the fifth and sixth grades).

Table 2. Description of the sample by age and sex

Age		Gender		Total
		male	female	
8	Number of respondents	4	5	9
	%	10,26%	8,20%	9,00%
9	Number of respondents	4	9	13
	%	10,26%	14,75%	13,00%
10	Number of respondents	12	18	30
	%	30,77%	29,51%	30,00%
11	Number of respondents	5	8	13
	%	12,82%	13,11%	13,00%
12	Number of respondents	10	15	25
	%	25,64%	24,59%	25,00%
13	Number of respondents	4	6	10
	%	10,26%	9,84%	10,00%
Total	Number of respondents	39	61	100
	%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

Age was observed in the study. As can be seen from Table 2, the youngest respondents are eight-year-olds, who are the least represented (9.00%). Most respondents are aged ten (30.00%), and the oldest respondents are thirteen-year-olds (10.00%). It can be seen that female respondents are more represented than male respondents, sixty-one girls (61.00%) and thirty-nine boys (39.00%) joined the survey.

Table 3. Description of the sample according to reading preference

		Number of respondents	%
Tendency to read	not interested at all	5	5,00%
	not interested	13	13,00%
	indifferent	16	16,00%
	interested	52	52,00%
	extremely interested	14	14,00%
	Total	100	100,00%

Respondents expressed a propensity to read with the following statements: I am not interested in reading at all 5.00%, I am not interested in reading 13.00%, I am neither interested nor disinterested in reading 16.00%, I am interested in reading 52.00%, I am extremely interested in reading 14.50 %. We see that the least are represented those who are not interested in reading at all, and the most represented are those who are interested in reading.

Table 4. Correlation between reading preference and gender determinant of the sample

			Gender		Total
			male	female	
Tendency to read	not interested at all	Number of respondents	3	2	5
		%	7,69%	3,28%	5,00%
	not interested	Number of respondents	8	5	13
		%	20,51%	8,20%	13,00%
	indifferent	Number of respondents	10	6	16
		%	25,64%	9,84%	16,00%
	interested	Number of respondents	12	40	52
		%	30,77%	65,57%	52,00%
	extremely interested	Number of respondents	6	8	14
		%	15,38%	13,11%	14,00%
	Total	Number of respondents	39	61	100
		%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

Self-assessment of interest in reading was measured on a Likert five-point scale, where the first degree indicates the absence of any interest, and the last, the fifth, indicates total interest. The table shows that the largest number of respondents are interested in reading (52.00%). This data, observed in relation to the gender category, shows that 30.77% of them are boys and 65.57% are girls. Of the 5.00% of those who are not interested in reading at all, 7.69% are boys and 3.28% are girls. 13.11% of girls are extremely interested in reading, while 15.38% of boys are interested in reading.

2.3. *The questionnaire*

A questionnaire was designed for the research, which, in addition to data on: grade, age, school, gender and assessment of reading aptitude, consisted of three questions that respondents had to determine: whether they had been previously familiar with picture books on the same/similar topic, degree of empathy / identification with the character and to assess the extent to which the perception of developmental disabilities matches their assumptions about the problem before reading the template and the usefulness of the information during reading (and by exchanging opinions after reading). The questionnaire brought the title in relation to the read template, each group read a picture book in which one disability was observed, i.e. each name / disability was observed by twenty respondents. The results were observed collectively.

2.4. *Results of statistical analysis and their interpretation*

2.4.1. Reception of picture books *The Girl and the book, Mucka, My Sister's Smile, The Story of Vedran, My Big Brother Matija*

Respondents (elementary school students) showed interest in *The Girl and the Book, Mucka, My Sister's Smile, The Story of Vedran, My Big Brother Matija*. The self-assessment of reading obtained by analyzing the first part of the questionnaire was confirmed by the distribution of answers in the part of the questionnaire that referred to the literary template itself.

Table 5. Assessment of familiarity with the picture book on developmental disabilities

<i>Picture Books</i>				
			Grade	Total
			3., 4., 5. i 6.	
<i>Djevojčica i knjiga (The Girl and the Book), Mucka (The Stutter Girl), Osmijeh moje sestre (The Smile of My Sister), Priča o Vedranu (The Story of Vedran), Moj veliki brat Matija (My Big Brother Matija)</i>	I am unfamiliar with the picture book	Number of respondents	86	86
		%	86,00%	86,00%
	I am only partially familiar with the picture book	Number of respondents	3	3
		%	3,00%	3,00%
	I am familiar with the picture book	Number of respondents	11	11
		%	11,00%	11,00%
Total	Number of respondents	100	100	
	%	100,00%	100,00%	

Familiarity with the picture book was observed according to the claims that: *the picture book is not known to me at all, the picture book is only partially known to me and the picture book is known to me*. The largest number of respondents showed unfamiliarity with the book, 86.00%, partial familiarity was shown by 3.00%, and familiarity with the picture book is confirmed by 11.00% of respondents.

Table 6. Assessment of empathy / identification with the character

			Grade	Total
			3., 4., 5. i 6.	
Ivana (<i>Djevojčica i knjiga</i>)	I can identify with the character	Number of respondents	14	14
		%	14,00%	14,00%
Lara (<i>Mucka</i>)	I can only partially identify with the character	Number of respondents	59	59
Ana (<i>Osmijeh moje sestre</i>)		%	59,00%	59,00%
Vedran (<i>Priča o Vedranu</i>)	I cannot identify with the character	Number of respondents	27	27
Matija (<i>Moj veliki brat Matija</i>)		%	27,00%	27,00%
Total		Number of respondents	100	100
		%	100,00%	100,00%

Although the research included respondents who do not have developmental disabilities, the aim was to examine whether they could express coexistence, i.e. whether they could identify with the character. Coexistence with the character was assessed according to the statements that they can be coexisted / identified with the figure of 14.00%, they can only be partially coexisted / identified with the figure of 59.00% and cannot be coexisted / identified with the figure of 27.00%. The largest number of respondents opted for partial coexistence / identification with the character, which could be expected with the relevant topic (illness).

Table 7. Assessment of coexistence / identification with the character in relation to gender

<i>Djevojčica i knjiga (The Girl and the Book), Mucka (The Stutter Girl), Osmijeh moje sestre (The Smile of My Sister), Priča o Vedranu (The Story of Vedran), Moj veliki brat Matija (My Big Brother Matija)</i>					
			Gender		Total
			male	female	
Ivana (<i>Djevojčica i knjiga</i>) Lara (<i>Mucka</i>)	I can identify with the character	Number of respondents	4	10	14
		%	10,26%	16,39%	14,00%
Ana (<i>Osmijeh moje sestre</i>) Vedran (<i>Priča o Vedranu</i>)	I can only partially identify with the character	Number of respondents	27	37	59
		%	69,23%	60,66%	59,00%
Matija (<i>Moj veliki brat Matija</i>)	I cannot identify with the character	Number of respondents	13	14	27
		%	33,33%	22,95%	27,00%
Total		Number of respondents	39	61	100
		%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

The degree of coexistence / identification with the character was also observed in relation to the gender category. Partial empathy / identification was confirmed by 69.23% of boys and 60.66 girls. Such a result is a bit unexpected because female protagonists, i.e. female characters were more represented: Ivana (*Girl and Book*), Lara (*Mucka*), Ana (*My Sister's Smile*).

Table 8. Assessment of matching the image of developmental disabilities with one's own image of difficulty before reading the text

<i>Djevojčica i knjiga (The Girl and the Book), Mucka (The Stutter Girl), Osmijeh moje sestre (The Smile of My Sister), Priča o Vedranu (The Story of Vedran), Moj veliki brat Matija (My Big Brother Matija)</i>				
			Grade	Total
			3., 4., 5. i 6.	
blindness, stuttering, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, attention deficit disorder	coincides with my notion of the difficulty before reading the picture book	Number of respondents	24	24
		%	24,00%	24,00%
	partially coincides with my notion of the difficulty before reading the picture book	Number of respondents	22	22
		%	22,00%	22,00%
	does not coincide with my notion of the difficulty before reading the picture book	Number of respondents	54	54
		%	54,00%	54,00%
Total		Number of respondents	100	100
		%	100,00%	100,00%

The distribution of answers on the correspondence of the notion of developmental disabilities to their own notion of disability before reading the text shows that 54.00% of respondents do not express the coincidence of the notion of disability before reading the picture book. Partial coincidence is shown by 22.00% of respondents, while 24.00% of respondents agree with the statement: *it coincides with my notion of disabilities before reading the picture book.*

Table 9. Assessment of the correspondence of the perception of developmental disabilities with one's own perception of difficulty before reading the text with regard to the gender of the respondents

<i>Djevojčica i knjiga (The Girl and the Book), Mucka (The Stutter Girl), Osmijeh moje sestre (The Smile of My Sister), Priča o Vedranu (The Story of Vedran), Moj veliki brat Matija (My Big Brother Matija)</i>					
			Gender		Total
			male	female	
blindness, stuttering, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, attention deficit disorder	coincides with my notion of the difficulty before reading the picture book	Number of respondents	16	8	24
		%	41,03%	13,11%	24,00%
	partially coincides with my notion of the difficulty before reading the picture book	Number of respondents	8	14	22
		%	20,51%	22,95%	22,00%
	does not coincide with my notion of the difficulty before reading the picture book	Number of respondents	15	39	54
		%	38,46%	63,93%	54,00%
Total	Number of respondents	39	61	100	
	%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	

The degree of correspondence of the notion of developmental disabilities with one's own notion of disability before reading the text was also observed in relation to the gender category, and the result of the correspondence in favor of boys was 41.03%. Girls, 63.93% of them, show a discrepancy with their own idea of disabilities before reading the picture book.

Table 10. Assessment of the usefulness of the obtained information on children with disabilities

			Gerade	Total
			3., 4., 5. i 6.	
<i>Djevojčica i knjiga (The Girl and the Book), Mucka (The Stutter Girl), Osmijeh moje sestree (The Smile of My Sister), Priča o Vedranu (The Story of Vedran), Moj veliki brat Matija (My Big Brother Matija)</i>				
information on developmental difficulties	not useful at all	Number of respondents	1	1
		%	1,00%	1,00%
	mostly useful	Number of respondents	25	25
		%	25,00%	25,00%
	completely useful	Number of respondents	74	74
		%	74,00%	74,00%
Total	Number of respondents	100	100	
	%	100,00%	100,00%	

The usefulness of the information about children with disabilities described in the picture books was shown through the distribution of answers as 1.00% *not useful at all*, 25.00% *mostly useful* and 74.00% *completely useful*. Respondents, therefore, confirmed in large numbers statistically (via a questionnaire), but also by talking after the research, that they could not say a lot about developmental disabilities such as: blindness, stuttering, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities and attention deficit, and that what they read was very useful.

2.5. Results in relation to the research of the reception of picture books on developmental disabilities

The aim of the research part of the paper was, based on the results of the survey, to examine whether they were previously familiar with the picture books *Girls and Books*, *Mucka*, *My Sister's Smile*, *The Story of Vedran* and *My Big Brother Matija*, which talk about

developmental disabilities, empathy / identification with the character, to what extent the notion of developmental disabilities coincides with their assumptions about the problem before reading the text and the usefulness of information on developmental disabilities obtained from the picture books. Respondents aged eight to thirteen were included in the study: the lowest number of respondents was eight years old, the highest was ten years old. There were more girls among the respondents. In the self-assessment of reading propensity, the respondents rated themselves mostly as claiming that they were interested in reading. Girls showed a greater tendency to read in relation to gender. Assessment of familiarity with picture books that problematize developmental disabilities shows that respondents are not familiar with them (86.00%). A large number of respondents can identify with the character (probably also through the described events, mostly school events). In assessing the usefulness of information on children with disabilities, respondents show that it is completely useful to them (72.00%). The research confirms the justification of the assumption about children who are not yet familiar with texts, in this case picture books, which problematize developmental disabilities and that the phrase in the title of the paper *application in practice* is almost non-existent or inconspicuous.

To conclude

Legal acts and ordinances cited in the paper served to define the basic concepts related to developmental disabilities, as well as to present the current division of types of developmental disabilities. *Disability*, *special needs* or *developmental disabilities* are terms used on a daily basis, and it has been established that there are certain semantic differences between them. The first part of the paper, which analyzes the templates (picture books), reveals the dominant theme of developmental disabilities: blindness (*Girl*), stuttering (*Mucka*), cerebral palsy (*My Sister's Smile*), intellectual disabilities (*The Story of Vedran*), Attention Deficit Disorder (*My Big Brother Matija*). The results of the research, which are an integral part of the second part of the paper, show that most children are not familiar with this type of text, with the problems that disabilities bring in the environment in which they are encountered, most often in the school environment. This leads to the final conclusion that it is important to introduce titles in practice (regardless of the genre category), and the results of this research show that there is most certainly reception potential.

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