



# Kindness Makes a Difference: Assessing the Efficacy of *Addy & Uno* and *The Realabilities Comic Book Series Curriculum* in Enhancing Children’s Sensitivity and Interest in Their Peers with Disabilities

Patrick Riley, Nava R. Silton, Ph.D. , Amanda Anzovino, & Lauren Ashbrook  
*Marymount Manhattan College*



## Abstract

Nineteen students penned qualitative letters following a performance of *Addy & Uno, A New-Broadway Musical* and after participating in *The Realabilities Comic Book Series Curriculum* intervention, which teaches about disabilities, pro-social values, and promotes a stop-bullying platform in and outside of the schools. Following the Musical and Comic Book Series Curriculum interventions, participants showed clear knowledge and comprehension of disabilities and of the importance of promoting a stop bullying platform. They also found the musical and comic series highly appealing.

## Introduction

Recent statistics suggest that from 2013-2014, 95% of all children and youth between the ages of 6 and 21, who were accommodated by IDEA, were enrolled in typical schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Moreover, the number of students who spent the lion’s share of their school day (80% or more time) in regular education classrooms increased from 33% from 1990-1991 to 62% from 2013-2014 (NCES, 2016). This significant rise in just over a decade, suggests that regular education schools will need to be increasingly well-equipped to accommodate students with disabilities in typical classrooms. Research suggests that simply including children with disabilities in the classroom does not ensure that typical children will increase their interest, positive attitudes, intentions and socialization with individuals with disabilities. In contrast, high quality interventions that effectively educate typical children about disabilities and encourage children to befriend individuals with disabilities are crucial towards fostering attitudes, intentions and promoting the socialization of typical children toward their peers with disabilities (Silton, 2015; Vignes et al., 2009).

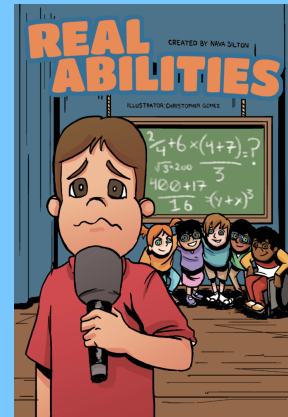
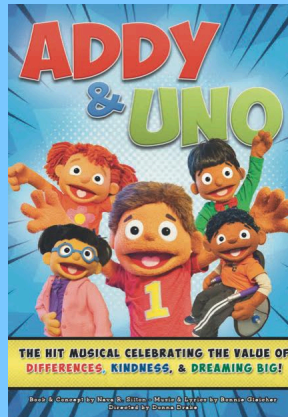
Advanced interventions which utilize an extended contact model, wherein stories, role-plays and other appealing, informative media are used, tend to be much more effective at enhancing the attitudes, intentions and interest of typical children toward their peers with disabilities. Considering the positive research findings from the previous *Realabilities* interventions, the researchers applied qualitative research methods to examine the benefits of the combined *Addy & Uno Off-Broadway Musical* and *The Realabilities Comic Book Series Curriculum*.

## Participants

Nineteen fourth grade students, nine males and ten females from a Jewish Day School in Paramus, New Jersey participated in the two-part disabilities intervention of *The Addy & Uno Musical* and *The Realabilities Educational Comic Book Series Curriculum*. All of the students self-reported that they were White and Jewish.

## Procedure

The fourth grade students viewed the *Addy & Uno Musical* and participated in *The Realabilities Educational Comic Book Series*. Following the Musical, the students penned qualitative letters to the creators of the musical and reflected on the following: 1) What they enjoyed most, 2) What they learned, 3) Whether they felt differently about disabilities and bullying following the Musical, 4) Whether they enjoyed the Musical and 5) Whether or not they would see the show again. Additionally, after reading the 11 *Realabilities Comics*, the students were asked to respond to the following questions: 1) Do you believe it’s important for kids to stop bullying? 2) Who was your favorite character in the comics and why? 3) Which comic book was your favorite and why? 4) What would you like the characters to do in the next *Realabilities* Comic book and finally, 5) Would you buy a *Realabilities* comic book? The students responded to all of the aforementioned questions and the responses were collected, stored in a secure database, coded and analyzed.



## Results

With respect to appeal, the fourth grade students shared that they most enjoyed “the puppets and thought they were very interesting,” “they liked when the bullies decided not to be mean,” and “liked when (they) learned a sentence in sign language (during the show).” Moreover, the students “liked when Uno’s friends helped him not be nervous” and “enjoyed the songs in the play.” Following the Musical, the students noted that they learned “not to treat people differently just because they are different” and that “people aren’t as different as we think they are.” The lion’s share of students said they enjoyed the Musical because it was “funny,” “interesting,” and “it was fun to hear the songs.” Furthermore, students shared that the Musical “taught me not to bully” and “helped me to be nice to be people who are different.”

Following the comic book series, the majority of students shared why they believe it is important to stop bullying. For instance, some students noted that “bullying can really hurt someone, even if it’s not physical,” “it affects how the kid being bullied feels about himself,” and “because it can hurt people’s feelings and (made) it like they’re not important to the world.” The majority of people liked Addy since she is “energetic and happy” and “she is really nice to people and her friends.” Uno was the next highly-rated character since he is “smart” and “likes math.” “Math Mania,” the comic portraying Uno’s preparation for a math competition and the comic that most closely relates to the Musical, was the most popular comic among the students. Students also enjoyed “Math Mania” because “it’s about math,” “Uno overcomes his fear,” and “Uno’s friends are helpful and supportive.” When asked what the students would like to see the characters do in a subsequent comic book, the students discussed a number of possibilities including “have a pool party and enjoy life,” “go to Mars in a real rocket that RJ moves,” and participate in more sports like baseball, snowboarding, and basketball. One student also wanted the characters to “tell us how they got their disabilities.” Finally, students wanted to purchase a *Realabilities* comic book because “it teaches kids to stop bullying,” and “it could teach you to be nice to people who are different.”

## Discussion

Thus, the researchers found that the combination of the *Addy & Uno Off-Broadway Musical* and *Realabilities Comic Book Series Curriculum* significantly enhanced typical students’ nuanced knowledge, interest and understanding of disabilities as well as the importance of promoting a stop bullying platform in their schools. Overall, the study results confirm that an extended contact model, wherein appealing storylines, role-plays and other engaging media can be highly advantageous towards teaching about disabilities, prior to or in addition to successfully interacting with children with disabilities in and outside of the classroom.