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Children's literature in child care: practice vs possibilities

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Background and significance: literacy

- As the Early years Learning framework (EYLF) is being implemented in Australia, there is also worldwide attention on early literacy as essential to successful engagement and participation in society (Raban and Fler, 2005).
- There is a strong focus on the development of early literacy practices through exposure to literature before children enter their formal school years (Halsall and Green ,1995; Swinson ,1985).
- Researchers such as Rogoff (1990), and Tharp and Gallimore (1988) place emphasis on the importance of early literacy practices being shared between adults and children in order for children to develop higher order cognitive and linguistic skills .

Background and significance: children's literature

In keeping with the outcomes and principles of the EYLF:

- children's literature can contribute to children's social and emotional development; can provide role models through the exploration of the traits of key characters in books, and; can teach children about important qualities such as friendship, cooperation, perseverance, respect and honesty (Kara-Soteriou & Rose, 2008).
- In addition, children's literature can be used to extend children's knowledge and understandings of themselves and others who may be different culturally, socially or historically (Tunnell and Jacobs, 2008; Morgan, 2009).
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Background and significance: principles of EYLF

- The EYLF charges educators with the goal of providing a curriculum that respects and celebrates the diversity within and between families, cultures and communities. Principle 4: Respect for Diversity, specifically states: “Educators honour the histories, cultures, languages and traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families” (2009, p. 13). This brings an added responsibility for educators to select children’s literature that promotes this value.
- The guiding principles of the EYLF highlight the importance of valuing and respecting the differing family structures, cultures, contexts and values of the children and families in the early childhood setting (Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009).

Background and significance: possible gaps

- However, the current children's literature resources of many early childhood centres contain:
- *Negative or absent representation of females, people of color, non-Christian and non-eastern religions, and emic (inside) perspectives from people of lower socioeconomic status or people with disabilities.* (Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008)

The effect of these disparities and uncritical reading of such literature can lead to:

- ...the possibility of stereotypes and attitudes that carry over into adulthood.....the collective effect of such literature contributes to discrimination and limits global perspective for White children and children of colour alike. (Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008, p. 944)
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Research Questions:

- What practices and resources currently exist in regard to children's literature within a range of child care settings:
 - What are the children's literature resources available and being used in these centres?
 - Whether, and to what extent, these resources and the practices through which they are used support the outcomes and principles of the Early Years Learning Framework?

Research design and methods

- A pilot study involving five long day care centres that investigated the resources and practices of educators with regard to using children's literature as a resource to further the aims of the EYLF.
- The centre coordinator plus the team leader in each of the kindy, toddlers and babies rooms for each centre were selected as participants.
- Qualitative data was collected through semi structured interviews; observations and an audit of resources.

Emerging patterns and themes

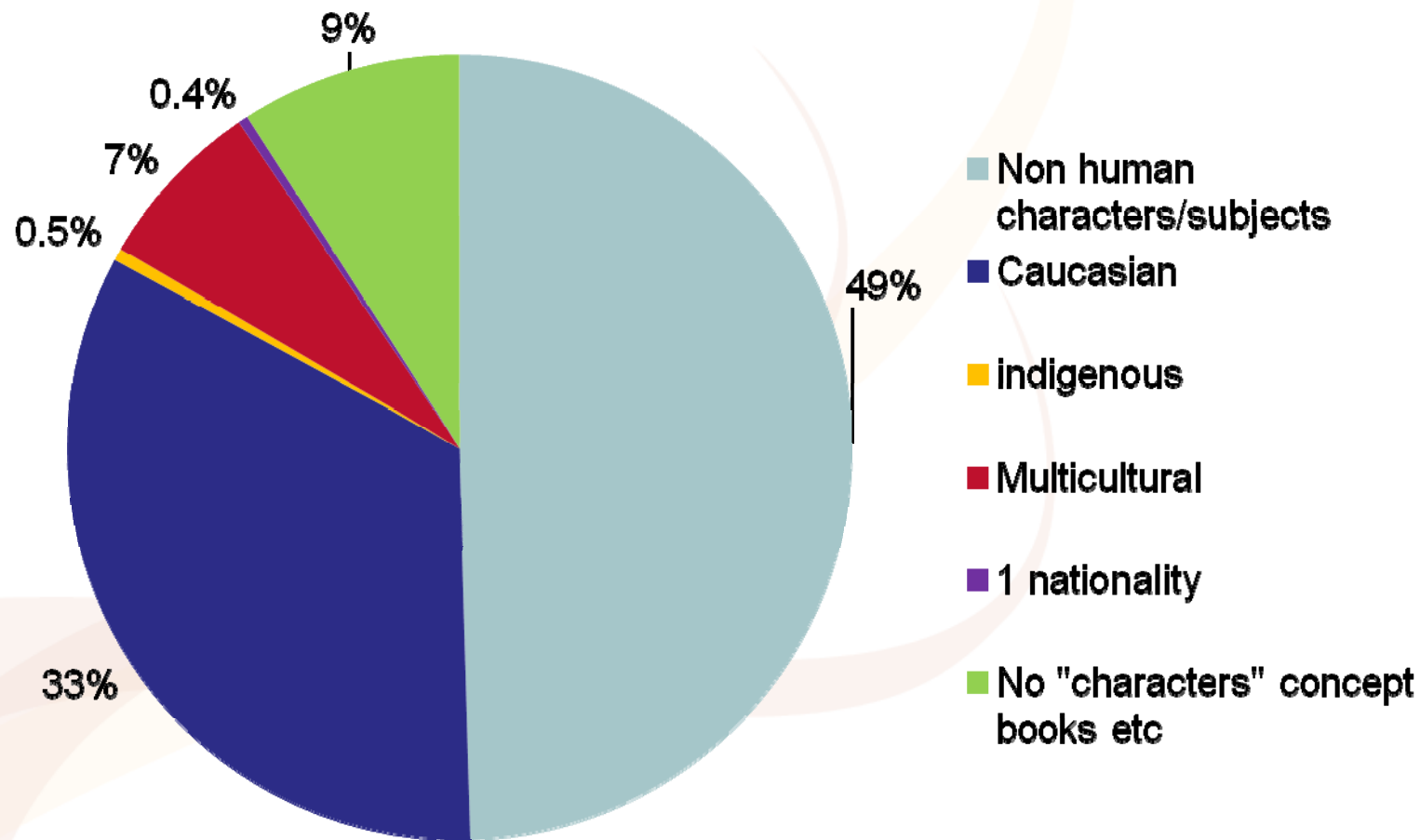
Three main themes emerged from the analysis of the data:

- educator beliefs about their own practice;
- educators' actual practice, and;
- availability and use of children's literature.

Interim findings

- Awareness and practice of educators in using books to develop outcomes related to sense of identity, belonging to community (though this decreased noticeably in the educators of toddlers and was almost completely absent in the practice of educators in the babies rooms) and early literacy skills
- Gap in understanding, availability and use of books from diverse perspectives
- Other significant issues include - age of books, budget, allowing children access to “the good books” etc

Overall Portrayal of Racial Diversity



Books freely available to children

