2020

The challenge of monoculturalism: What books are educators sharing with children and what messages do they send?

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The challenge of monoculturalism: what books are educators sharing with children and what messages do they send?

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Abstract

The importance of recognising, valuing and respecting a child's family, culture, language and values is increasingly articulated in educational policy. Diversity and inclusion are central themes of the guiding principles of early childhood education and care in Australia. Children's literature can be a powerful tool for extending children's knowledge and understandings of themselves and others who may be different culturally, socially or historically. However, evidence suggests many settings provide monocultural book collections which are counterproductive to principles of diversity. This paper reports on a larger study investigating factors and relationships influencing the use of children's literature to support principles of cultural diversity in the kindergarten rooms of long day care centres. The study was conducted within an ontological perspective of constructivism and an epistemological perspective of interpretivism informed by sociocultural theory. A mixed methods approach was adopted and convergent design was employed to interpret significant relationships and their meanings. Twenty-four educators and 110 children from four long day care centres in Western Australia participated. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, video-based observations, field notes, document analysis and a book audit. This study identified that current book collections in these four kindergarten rooms of long day care centres promote monocultural viewpoints and 'othering' of minority groups through limited access to books portraying inclusive and authentic cultural diversity. These findings have important social justice implications. The outcomes of this study have implications for educators, policy makers, early childhood organisations and those providing higher education and training for early childhood educators.

Keywords Diversity · Inclusion · Inclusive education · Early childhood education · Literature · Social justice

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🖄 Springer

Introduction

An important social justice issue worldwide is that of diversity within society. Since the African-American civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of multicultural education has become a topical and widely researched social justice issue centred on the concepts of understanding, respect and value for diversity (Bishop 1997; Hickling-Hudson 2005; McNaughton 2001; Nieto 2000). Over the past 30 years, this has become an increasingly important factor for policy makers and educators worldwide.

The term "diversity" is generally held to encompass a broad range of differences including differences in age, race, colour, religion, ethnicity, gender, languages and sexual orientation. It can also include socio-economic background, education, work experience, and physical and mental capabilities (Deakin University Definitions 2019). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Australian Government in 1989, placed diversity at the centre of considerations for the care and education of children (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989). This declaration explicitly reinforces the aspects of diversity as defined above as well as also referring to nations of origin, the values of those nations and respect for those from different civilisations. Several of these are closely related and can be grouped broadly under race and culture.

The 2011 census showed that "Australians come from more than 200 countries, speak over 300 languages at home, belong to more than 100 different religious groups and work in more than 1000 different occupations" (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011a). This increasing diversity of the Australian population is reflected in educational policies and is deemed an important element of consideration for educators.

A wide body of research attests to the importance of race and culture in the development of children's sense of identity, well-being and worldviews. Very early in life children develop an awareness and recognition of difference, with a body of evidence suggesting that children develop own-race bias from as young as three to six months of age (Apfelbaum et al. 2012; Bar-Haim et al. 2006). Importantly, studies indicate this bias can be disrupted or eliminated through even brief exposure to other racial faces, including in picture form (Bar-Haim et al. 2006; Sangrigoli and De Schonen 2004).

Evidence also highlights the importance of including literature as a way of introducing children to others who are different from themselves (Bishop 1992, 1997, 2012; Boutte et al. 2008; Klefstad and Martinez 2013; Sims 1982; Souto-Manning et al. 2018). However, evidence suggests that many childhood education and care centres in English-speaking countries, including Australia, provide monocultural, exclusive and potentially biased literature that can cumulatively impact on children's long term attitudes and perceptions of diversity and well-being (Adam et al. 2017, 2019; Boutte et al. 2008; Stallworth 2006; Souto-Manning et al. 2018).

Early learning environments

Education and care policies worldwide and in Australia currently embrace this body of evidence by stipulating there must be consideration of racial and cultural diversity in educational provision. This is articulated in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR 2009) which is the government mandated curriculum for early education and care in Australia for birth to 8 years of age, and in the National Quality Standards (NQS), the formal assessment process for education and care providers in Australia. Therefore, this article focusses on race and culture as key aspects of diversity to be considered in the early childhood environment.

In order to meet the NQS, it is important for all elements of child care play and learning environments, resources and educator practice to reflect consideration of diversity. This suggests that for children's literature to be used as a means of meeting the NQS and achieving the EYLF outcomes in a way that is consistent with its principles and practices, the selection of texts should take place with reference to these policies.

Respectful and inclusive literature

Inclusive literature promoting respect for the cultures, backgrounds and multiple perspectives of society (Bush 2008; Harper and Brand 2010) can contribute to, and strengthen, a child's sense of identity and belonging and support their learning and holistic development (Kara-Soteriou and Rose 2008; Klefstad and Martinez 2013). Literature reflects and constructs human experience for those responding to the literature; thus, situations and characters with which children can identify can have a profound effect on children (Morgan 2009; Rosenblatt 2005). When children see characters and situations familiar to them, a sense of affirmation can occur. However, when children do not see authentic or accurate representations of familiar situations or characters, they can be left with a sense of exclusion. This can lead to social and emotional implications for their sense of self-efficacy and identity, and for their academic achievement (Bennet et al. 2017). This highlights the importance of providing authentic culturally diverse literature so that all children can achieve the benefits of book sharing.

Identifying and categorising inclusive children's literature

While studies relating to the inclusion of multicultural literature in early childhood are unequivocal about its importance, challenges arise when identifying and categorising multicultural books and book collections. Diversity as a social construct is multi-dimensional, complex and ever-changing (Boyd et al. 2015). When considering cultural diversity, commonly considered characteristics include "themes centred on race, ethnicity, culture, and languages" (Boyd et al. 2015 p. 379). As a result of

these many characteristics, multiple definitions and approaches to categorisation of multicultural literature are evident in the literature.

Some, including Boutte et al. (2008) Cole and Valentine (2000) and Brinson (2012), analysed multicultural children's books according to the portrayal of differing ethnicities such as African, European, Latino, Hispanic and Native American. Gopalakrishnan and Becker (2011) took a more critical approach by defining multicultural literature as relating to "groups who have been previously underrepresented and often marginalized by society as a whole" (p. 5). Bishop refers to "people of color" (Bishop 1997 p. 35), further asserting that colour is a serious and divisive issue in society and that the "absence of such literature has constituted one of the most glaring omissions in the canon of children's literature" (Bishop 1997 p. 35). Bishop (1997) categorises people or characters in children's literature largely by skin colour and other visual features. Bishop's work has become seminal research in the field of multicultural children's literature.

A further body of evidence argues that many children's books continue to promote misunderstandings through exotic representation, stereotyping and inauthentic portrayal of the ideologies, viewpoints and lifestyles of non-dominant cultural groups (Bishop 1997; Chaudhri and Schau 2016; David 2001; Roberts et al. 2005). Some argue such issues arise because non-dominant cultural groups have often been written about by authors from the dominant culture, reflecting limited understanding or knowledge of the cultural group in question (Bishop 1997; Chaudhri and Schau 2016; David 2001; Roberts et al. 2005). Of particular concern is the representation of First Nations groups worldwide who, it has been argued, are often portrayed in books through ill-informed ethnic stereotypes resulting in distorted or superficial representation which contributes to further misunderstanding and prejudice (Chaudhri and Schau 2016; David 2001; Roberts et al. 2005).

Pilot study

A small pilot study was conducted in 2011 involving 20 informants across five long day care centres. An analysis of the children's literature resources in the five participating centres showed that only 10% of books in the centres contained non-Caucasian characters and in the majority of these the main character was Caucasian (Adam et al. 2017).

This study

This paper reports on one part of a larger study which investigated the factors and relationships influencing the use of children's literature to support principles relating to cultural diversity in the kindergarten rooms of long day care centres. This paper reports on the portrayal of cultural diversity, cultural viewpoints and ideologies in the books available and shared in the participant rooms.

This study was conducted within an ontological perspective of constructivism and an epistemological perspective of interpretivism informed by sociocultural

theory. A mixed methods approach was adopted and convergent design employed to synthesise the qualitative and quantitative data and interpret significant relationships and their meanings.

This paper reports on the following research question:

What and what types of children's literature texts are selected to address principles of cultural diversity in the kindergarten rooms of long day care centres?

Ethics

The research was conducted with ethics approval granted through (Edith Cowan University - Project 10741), participants were given an information letter outlining the purpose of the research and their involvement. They were informed about confidentiality and security and their right to withdraw. All participants agreed to take part and signed a consent form.

Participants

The study was conducted in the kindergarten rooms of four long day care centres in Western Australia selected by stratified purposeful sampling. This sampling was informed by data from the 2011 Australian Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2011b) in order to select regions of diverse demographics including differing socio-economic profiles, varied ethnic population concentrations and urban and rural communities. Stratified purposeful sampling is particularly useful to study different models of implementing a particular teaching and learning strategy (Suri 2011), in this case, that of book sharing with young children.

Long day care centres in Western Australia provide full-time or part-time care usually for birth to five years in purpose-built or adapted buildings. Long day care centres are owned and managed by non-profit organisations, local councils, community organisations, private operators and employers. All long day care services must be operated in accordance with the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] 2012).

Long day care centres typically operate in a multi room facility with children located in rooms according to their age. A typical long day care centre has separate rooms for babies (birth–24 months), toddlers (24–36 months) and kindergarten (36 months–preschool age) children. From 2012, long day care centres with more than 25 children have been required to employ at least one educator who holds an early childhood teaching qualification.

Research participants and selection

Twenty-four educators agreed to take part in the research, with qualifications ranging from an Education Assistant Diploma to a Bachelor of Education. The educators recruited included each centre coordinator and the educators in the kindergarten

rooms of the centres. The children in the participating kindergarten room of each centre also participated. The parents of the children were invited to give informed consent for observation of children's participation and engagement in book sharing and use. There were 110 child participants. The four centres and all participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. For the purpose of this paper, the books available in each centre and the observational data relating to the books shared by educators and children were analysed and reported on.

Data instruments and collection

Data were drawn from an inventory of 2413 children's books, from 148 video recorded observations of book sharing sessions, and from field notes. Multiple data sources provided opportunities for triangulation of findings thus enabling validation of themes by cross checking information from multiple sources.

Table 1 is an advanced organiser that summarises the research instruments, tools and analysis procedures together with the data collected and the focus of research for each data source. This table also links to the data analysis processes, which will be outlined later in this section.

Table 2 shows the data collection phases of the study and the tools and process implemented during each phase. Following the table, the data sources are described and an explanation of each research tool is given, making connections to research methodology and literature to situate the tool in the context of this study.

Book audit

An audit was conducted of all children's books available for sharing in each kindergarten room. A software program called *Book Collector* was used in conjunction with an ISBN scanning app called CLZ Barry on an iPhone 5 to record the publishing details of the books.

The software package is designed as a commercial package for consumers to record publication details of their book collections. There are additional fields the consumer can choose to customise to suit their purpose and to which they can manually add information. For the purpose of this paper, the customised field of Cultural Diversity Categories was included and analysed.

Cultural diversity categories framework

The Cultural Diversity Categories Framework (See Table 3 in Appendix 1) was developed from the work of Bishop (1992, 1997, 2012; Sims 1982[1]). Bishop's categories were designed to assess the quality and validity of the portrayal of race and culture in children's books and have remained constant for over 25 years and been found to be effective by other researchers (Crisp et al. 2016). Bishop's three

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[1] Bishop's research in 1982 was published under her maiden name of Sims.

Table 1 Advanced organiser of data collection, data sources, research tools and analysis processes

Data collection (bold indicates method)	Research focus	Data tools/collection	Analysis tools/processes
Book audit - publication details, - genre - themes portrayed - cultural/racial portrayal *Observations (video and field notes)* - books shared	Publication details Genre Racial portrayal Cultural Portrayal Ethnicity Lifestyles Viewpoints Ideologies	Book Collector Database Cultural Diversity Categories Framework (CDCF) Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework (VIF) Excel Spreadsheet – Detailed Observation Spreadsheet (ESDOS) Field Notes	Conversion of book collector database into multiple spreadsheets to quantify books in each category of CDCF and VIF Transference of data from ESDOS and collated into multiple spreadsheets to quantify statistics relating to book sharing (including relating to each category of CDCF, VIF) Triangulation of data produced by these processes

Table 2 Data collection phases

Phases	Tools and processes
Conduct book audit—riverview	1. Book collector database entry 2. Apply cultural diversities framework to all books in riverview 3. Apply viewpoints and ideologies framework to purposeful sample of books used in riverview 4. Cross check VIF data with CDCF to identify any categories not analysed through VIF
Conduct book audit—community house	1. Book collector database entry 2. Apply cultural diversities framework to all books in community house 3. Apply viewpoints and ideologies framework to purposeful sample of culturally authentic books (the category not analysed through VIF in riverview) 4. Cross check detailed field notes of books shared to confirm VIF categories of books shared
Conduct book audit—dockside	1. Book collector database entry 2. Apply cultural diversities framework to all books in dockside 3. Cross check detailed field notes of books shared to confirm VIF categories of books shared
Conduct book audit—argyle	1. Book collector database entry 2. Apply cultural diversities framework to all books in dockside 3. Cross check detailed field notes of books shared to confirm VIF categories of books shared

categories were ascribed the labels of Culturally Authentic, Culturally Generic and Culturally Neutral. Indicators for each were drawn from Bishop's work and, in the case of the Culturally Generic Category, one indicator was modified to include the Australian context.

As all children's books available to be shared were to be included in the book audit, there was a need for categories for those books which did not contain any representation of cultural diversity. There were two additional categories required. The first of these was Solely Caucasian, assigned to books in which only Caucasian people were represented in non-fiction books or as characters in fiction books. The second additional category was that of No People, assigned to books with no human representation such as fictional animal stories or non-fiction texts including concept books and content books.

Viewpoints and ideologies framework

While the Cultural Diversities Categories Framework provided one measure of viewpoints and ideologies in books containing people, a large number of books in the study contained only non-human characters. These, too, portray social viewpoints and ideologies that may be harder to distinguish than books containing people, and identifying these viewpoints and ideologies was important to the study. To

carry out this analysis, the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework was developed from the work of Boutte et al (2008) (Appendix 2).

Using indicators developed by Boutte et al., the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework was developed to analyse books for ethnicity, gender and social class and affirmation of dominant or non-dominant cultural viewpoints. For the purpose of this paper, the data relating to ethnicity and cultural viewpoints were considered. In their study, Boutte et al. (2008) examined 29 fiction books. In this study, however, there were extensive book collections containing both fiction and non-fiction books so additional indicators for evaluating non-fiction texts were included.

Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability of both instruments was undertaken using a random selection of 34% ($n=14$) of the books shared in the first centre ($n=41$). Each of the three raters independently read the books and coded them using the two frameworks highlighting relevant indicators. The inter-rater reliability was 100%.

Book sharing sessions' observation data

Video recorded observations were taken of every book sharing session for a period of five consecutive week days in each centre. For the purpose of this paper, the data used from the observations relate only to the books selected for sharing during the study in order to confirm the books selected for sharing and to confirm the book categorisation results.

Field notes

Detailed field notes about book selection and participant involvement in book sharing sessions were kept during the study. For the purpose of this paper, the field notes were used to confirm the books selected for sharing and to confirm the book categorisation results.

Data analysis

Publication details of each book were automatically recorded through the software and entered into the Book Collector Database. Then, the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework was applied to each book in order to measure the portrayal of cultural diversity. Books with no people were categorised as No People. Books containing only Caucasian people were categorised as Solely Caucasian. Books containing people from cultures other than Caucasian were analysed by comparing the text and images in the book to the indicators on the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework. Addressing the indicators included analysing images and text for representation and mention of people from non-Caucasian cultures as well as the overall focus or purpose of the book. Books were then assigned the matching Cultural Diversity category and this information was

added to the Book Collector database. These categories were Culturally Neutral, Culturally Generic and Culturally Authentic. Indicators for these are contained Table 3 in Appendix 1.

The Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework was then applied to a purposeful sample of all the books shared in Riverview ($n = 41$). This was undertaken in Riverview in order to confirm the categorisation of the books early in the study. Extensive field notes were subsequently kept throughout the observations in the other three centres to note the viewpoints and ideologies reflected in the books shared in those centres. Following the analysis with the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework in Riverview, the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework was again consulted to cross check that all categories of books from the Cultural Diversities Categories Framework had been analysed through both instruments. This process identified that the only category of book that was not shared in Riverview during the study, and thus not already analysed through the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework was that of Culturally Authentic. In the second centre, Community House, books from the Culturally Authentic Category were shared; therefore, a further purposeful sample was undertaken relating to the three Culturally Authentic books shared in Community House. This ensured all Cultural Diversity Categories Framework categories of books were analysed for viewpoints and ideologies using the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework.

Subsequently, the observation records were analysed to identify the specific books shared during the study and the categories assigned to them through the two instruments. The overall collection of books available across the four centres totalled 2413 books. A total of 221 books were shared across the four centres during the study. Community House was the only centre to use Culturally Authentic books ($n = 3$).

All data were then quantified through calculating frequencies of each category and converting these to percentages.

Results

The representation of cultural diversity in the total collection

When the books from the Culturally Authentic, Culturally Neutral and Culturally Generic Categories of the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework were considered together, it was apparent that only 18% of books in the total collection ($n = 2413$) contained any representation of cultural diversity as shown in Fig. 1.

Almost half of the books in the total collection were in the No People category and this was relatively consistent across the collections in each centre.

Of the 221 books observed in book sharing during the study, 20% contained some Cultural Diversity as shown in Fig. 2. Notably, only 1% of books shared were from the Culturally Authentic category and these were all shared in the same centre (Community House).

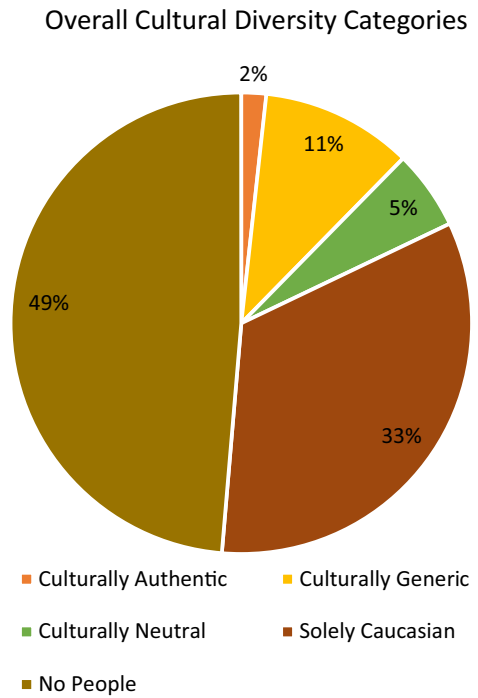**Fig. 1** Cultural diversity in the total collection (to nearest whole percent)

Overall Cultural Diversity Categories

2%
11%
5%
49%
33%

■ Culturally Authentic   ■ Culturally Generic

■ Culturally Neutral   ■ Solely Caucasian

■ No People

Fig. 2 Cultural diversity categories of books shared in the study

Cultural Diversity Categories of Books Shared in the Study

1%
10%
9%
48%
32%

■ Culturally Authentic   ■ Culturally Generic   ■ Culturally Neutral

■ Solely Caucasian   ■ No People
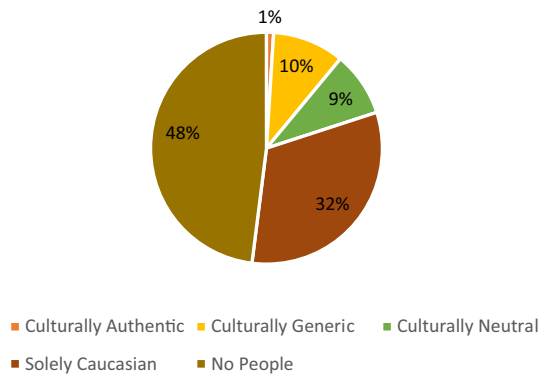
Viewpoints and ideologies in the books

The results from the purposeful sample of books ($n = 41$) shared in Riverview are provided here as a vignette to illustrate the viewpoints and ideologies portrayed in the books. Thirty-two of these were fiction and nine were non-fiction.

This analysis showed that all fiction books shared in Riverview reflected majority culture viewpoints and ideologies. Furthermore, the only fiction books

shared that contained any portrayal of cultural diversity were from the Culturally Neutral category of the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework, yet analysis through the Viewpoint and Ideologies Framework showed that these reflected dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies.

Sixteen of these books contained a Caucasian main character. In nine of these books, all the characters were Caucasian and in the other seven books there were one or two people featured in the illustrations who were of minority racial appearance. In only one of these books did a character representing a minority group play a role in the story itself with the remainder simply being present in illustrations. Examples of these included a Chinese child in a playground amongst several Caucasian children, and a child of colour in a classroom with several Caucasian children. In each of these books, these minority characters could have been replaced with Caucasian characters with no impact on the storyline itself.

In the one book in which characters of a race other than Caucasian were involved in the story, they were of middle-eastern background which was identified through dress and geographical location. The story in this book was narrated from the point of view of an animal character and presented Christian/Western ideologies and themes from the viewpoint of a child being born to save the world with a key overall theme of sharing. One book had an animal as the main character with all minor human characters being Caucasian. Fourteen of the fiction books were animal stories with no human portrayal. Analysis through the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework showed that all of these affirmed dominant culture lifestyles and ideologies through the text and illustrations reflecting dominant culture lifestyles such as middle class western style housing, western style food, dress, cars and daily activities.

Comparison with the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework showed that eight of these fiction books shared were Culturally Neutral, 10 were Solely Caucasian and the remaining 14 were No People. There were no fiction books from the Culturally Authentic or Culturally Generic categories shared in Riverview.

Of the seven non-fiction texts containing human portrayal, one was solely about one race. When considered through the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework in terms of audience, style of language and focus of topics, it was apparent that this book assumed a dominant culture audience and aimed to teach children about the country with a partial focus on life in China. Another five non-fiction books contained a variety of races and analysis through the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework showing all of these reinforced stereotypical or exotic viewpoints of particular races through background or dress. An example of this was the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australian being portrayed as living in the outback, being semi-naked and playing a didgeridoo. In another example, a book with diverse cultures portrayed the people using unnatural skin colours including yellow and purple while all activities represented in illustrations or text were related to dominant culture lifestyle.

One book was classified through the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework as affirming minority group lifestyles. However, this book was written in 1997 and portrayed children from different countries telling their favourite folktales from their culture. The background information on the lives of the children in the book provided some affirmation of their lifestyles yet it was clearly focussed on lives in countries other than in Australia. The children in this book were pictured in their national dress.

Two non-fiction books were classified as "neither" for racial representation through the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework because they were information books solely about animals. These were classified through this framework as portraying dominant culture viewpoints as the language about these animals from countries other than Australia focussed on these animals as being different or unusual with an underlying assumption that these would be outside the everyday experience of the reader.

Comparison with the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework showed that all of the non-fiction books shared that contained people were from the Cultural Diversity Category of Culturally Generic with the remaining two books being from the No People category. No non-fiction books from the Culturally Authentic or Culturally Neutral categories were shared in Riverview.

While only books shared in Riverview were selected for the purposeful sample and analysed to reveal the passive ideologies and assumptions evident, ideologies evident in books shared in the remaining centres were recorded in comprehensive field notes. These notes were analysed and the findings compared to the purposeful sample results. Where divergent results were identified, they were further analysed using the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework.

As outlined earlier, this process identified that the only type of book in the Cultural Diversity Categories Framework not shared in Riverview during the study was that from the category of Culturally Authentic. To ensure all categories of books were analysed for viewpoints and ideologies, the three culturally authentic books shared (in Community House) were selected as a further purposeful sample and are provided here as a further vignette.

In Community House, three fiction books from the Culturally Authentic Category were shared and these all affirmed the lifestyles and viewpoints of a non-Caucasian culture. While this was unsurprising giving their Cultural Diversity Category Framework category of Culturally Authentic, this secondary analysis reinforced that Culturally Authentic books was the only category of books to affirm cultural viewpoints and ideologies of non-dominant cultures. These represented less than 2.5% of books shared in Community House and less than 1.5% of books shared in book sharing sessions across all centres.

While 20% of the books shared during the study contained some cultural diversity, as shown earlier in Fig. 2, the only books shared in the study that reflected the viewpoints and ideologies of non-dominant cultures were the three Culturally Authentic books shared in Community House. Thus, 99% of the books shared promoted dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies as shown in Fig. 3. In three of the four centres, all books shared in the book sharing sessions reflected dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies.

Discussion

The majority of the books in the collection (82%) or shared (80%) were not reflective of cultural diversity. Furthermore, most of the books in the total collection (18%), and books shared (20%) that did portray some cultural diversity, reflected stereotypical, superficial or out-dated views of minority cultures presented from a dominant culture

Fig. 3 Ideologies and viewpoint of books shared

Viewpoints and Ideologies Presented in the Books Shared in the Study

1%

99%

■ Dominant Culture   ■ Non-Dominant Culture
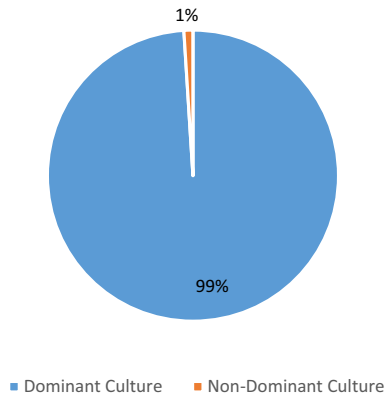
viewpoint. Only 2% of the total collection and 1% of books shared were from the Culturally Authentic category of the Cultural Diversities Categories Framework. Further, the books available to be shared in all centres overwhelmingly portrayed dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies, as has been found in other studies (Adam et al. 2017; Boutte et al. 2008; Crisp et al. 2016). The viewpoints and ideologies of people from non-dominant cultures were largely absent as found in other studies (Adam et al. 2017; David 2001; Roberts et al. 2005). Thus, 98% of the books in the collections and 99% of books shared during the study presented dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies.

Almost 50% of the book collections and 39% of books shared during the study contained no people, yet these too overwhelmingly reflected dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies. Content analysis of anthropomorphised books in this study and in others (Borkfelt 2011; Boutte et al. 2008) shows that the lifestyle, viewpoints and activities of non-human characters mirror those of the dominant cultures. In addition, evidence shows that animals, too, can be typecast or stereotyped into particular roles and thus reinforce notions of superiority and inferiority (Borkfelt 2011; Dunn 2011; Kohl 1995). Evidence suggests many children from ethnic minority groups are more likely to see a dinosaur or rabbit as a main character in a book than a member of their own culture (Cooperative Children's Book Center 2017) thus further contributing to the invisibility of minority groups in book collections.

Limited perspectives

As with the pilot study (Adam et al. 2017, 2019), the majority of the characters or people of colour in the books with some representation of diversity had secondary roles with the main characters being Caucasian. In many of the books, these characters played no part in the text of the story, only being present in pictures as background characters. Evidence shows illustrations attract more visual attention than print for young children who use their working memory capacity to interpret these

and link the story content with them (Mol and Bus 2011). Thus, the portrayal of minority characters as background to the actions of white characters in illustrations can lead to the impression that Whiteness is of greater value and importance and this can contribute to discrimination and prejudice (Bishop 1997). Furthermore, most of these books contained either stereotypical portrayal of races, with few or no specific details to define these characters or people culturally, as also found by Bishop (1997), for example, tokenistic illustrations including those which repeat elements such as chopsticks or fans in books representing Asian Culture or use writing made to look foreign, such as a font mimicking Chinese or Japanese writing (Morgan 2009). Such tokenism can contribute to a stereotypical or discriminatory perspective. It is important for children to see their own culture and those different from themselves represented in authentic and contemporary ways and in multiple books if they are to develop a strong sense of identity and of understanding and respect for others (Bishop 1997; Boutte et. al 2008; Colombo 2019; Souto-Manning et al. 2018).

In this study, the books reflecting cultural diversity were almost all written by members of the dominant culture and aimed to "teach" children about other cultures. Examples of this included a series of books written from the perspective of a tourist travelling in different countries. The wording of these books indicated clearly that they were about "other places". A book shared in one centre to promote intercultural understandings portrayed children in national costumes on each page positioned alongside items commonly associated with that culture. For example, children in China were represented in national dress, standing on the Great Wall of China alongside a Chinese dragon and children in Germany wore lederhosen and stood outside a stall selling sausages. Brinson (2012) and others (Morgan 2009; Pang 1992) have cautioned that educators should avoid books that rely heavily on characters wearing traditional clothing, further arguing that if using such books, educators should highlight that this clothing is only worn for special occasions.

In addition, in most centres there was only one book intended to represent one culture or even multiple cultures. Tschida et al. (2014) argue that the use of a single book to accurately represent a culture can add to the risk of stereotyping and marginalising children from the culture represented. They argue that such practice promotes what they call a "single story" to represent a culture which instead can create stereotypes which are both untrue and incomplete. When used repeatedly "these single stories become so much a part of our lives that we are often unaware of the ways in which they operate" (Tschida et al. 2014, p. 30).

Addressing the challenge

The dearth of culturally inclusive books available is concerning. The recent publication of a database of 340 culturally diverse Australian children's books ("The Cultural Diversity Database" [CDD] 2019) by the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL), while developed to assist educators in accessing and selecting culturally diverse books, may be further evidence of the challenges facing educators seeking culturally diverse literature. Of particular concern is that only 50 of the 340 are listed as suitable for the early years. Included in this small collection are animal

stories, books with Caucasian main characters and those by majority culture authors. Given that the overall collection of books held by the NCACL consists of over 45,000 books, this again highlights the dearth of culturally diverse books. Evidence from the UK and USA is similar. In the USA, only 11% of 3500 children's books received by the Cooperative Children's Book Centre (CCBC) in 2014 reflected minority group perspectives (Crisp et al. 2016). Similarly, data released in 2017 by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) in the UK showed that only 4% of the children's books published in 2017 featured characters belonging to a minority ethnic background (BAME) with only 1% having a BAME main character (CLPE 2018).

In recent years, there have been increasing calls for diverse books and, especially, the voices and authorship of minority groups in those books through social media platforms. In 2014, a movement known as the "We Need Diverse Books" movement began in the USA through the social media platform Twitter (Yokota 2015; "WNDB" 2019), led largely by the voices of minority background authors, illustrators and publishing insiders. Others are promoted through use of social media hashtags such as #ownvoices ("#OwnVoices" 2018) which calls for the increased publication of books authored by those from minority background, and #loveozya, drawing attention to the need for diversity in Australian young adult literature ("About LoveOzYA" 2019). It could be argued that these are positive signs suggesting that awareness of both the importance and challenges of building authentic multicultural book collections may be growing, including a stronger call for changes in the publishing industry itself.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study found that the majority of books in the four participating long day care centres in Western Australia did not portray cultural diversity. The representation of non-dominant cultural groups in the few remaining books was largely stereotypical or tokenistic and, in some cases, out-dated. In addition, the books overwhelmingly portrayed dominant culture ideologies and viewpoints, as has been found by others (Boutte et al. 2008; Crisp et al. 2016). This raises important concerns regarding expectations and requirements for selecting and using literature in early learning settings. This is particularly the case for literature that is inclusive of the worldviews and perspectives of children from non-dominant cultures. There are associated challenges relating to provision of culturally authentic texts for those in both the educational and general publishing industries.

The nature of the book collections needs to be more inclusive and representative of the diversity in our society. In particular, the inclusion of more culturally authentic texts is required. This will require improved training and the development of guidelines for educators to assist them to recognise and select culturally authentic books suited to their purpose. Access to suitable texts has additional implications for the publishing industry where greater awareness of and attention to the demands of diversity may be needed to encourage publication of culturally authentic books which reflect Australia's diversity and are suitable for this age group. Improved access to quality culturally authentic children's literature is important if the principles of diversity that lie at the heart of Australian educational policy are to be achieved.

The relatively small size of the sample (four centres) necessarily limits the generalisability of the findings. It could be argued, however, that the rigour of the study allows for implications to be relevant to similar contexts. Further studies could take the research into differing educational contexts, including community and school-based kindergartens as well as other early learning environments such as early childhood classrooms in primary schools. Since this study was undertaken, some positive signs have emerged through movements such as the We Need Diverse Books Movement (WNDB 2019) and the publication and promotion of resources such as the Cultural Diversity Database (Collections 2019) by the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature, with similar databases also available in other countries. Further research could investigate whether and to what extent these initiatives are impacting the use of diverse children's literature to address principles of diversity.

Appendix 1

See Table 3.

Table 3 Cultural diversity categories framework. Adapted from Bishop (1992)

Categories	Indicators
Culturally authentic	• "illuminate the experience of growing up a member of a particular, non-white cultural group" (Bishop 1992) • Have potential to increase appreciation and understandings of those not from this culture • Books are written by people of the culture reflected in the book
Culturally Generic	• "featuring characters who are members of so-called minority groups, but contain few, if any specific details that might serve to define those characters culturally." (Bishop 1992) • Assumed audience is White • Themes present White European American/ Australian values and activities • Characters may be portrayed in stereotypical ways in illustrations
Culturally Neutral	• "feature people of colour but are fundamentally about something else" (Bishop 1992) • "cultural authenticity is not likely to be a major consideration" (Bishop 1992) • The character/s of "colour" could be replaced with a white character with no impact on the overall story
Solely Caucasian	• All humans/characters are Caucasian
NA	• Non-human characters or no characters at all • E.g.: Animal Stories Concept books

Appendix 2: Viewpoints and ideologies framework

Title:

Author:

Publication Date:

Main character			
Ethnicity:	Caucasian		
Notes/indicators:			
Gender:	Male	Female	neither/both
Notes/indicators:			
SES:	Low /working	Middle	Upper
Notes/indicators:			

Secondary character 1			
Ethnicity:	Caucasian		
Notes/indicators:			
Gender:	Male	Female	neither/both
Notes/indicators:			
SES:	Low /working	Middle	Upper
Notes/indicators:			

Secondary character 2			
Ethnicity:	Caucasian		
Notes/indicators:			
Gender:	Male	Female	neither/both
Notes/indicators:			
SES:	Low /working	Middle	Upper
Notes/indicators:			

Secondary character 3			
Ethnicity:	Caucasian		
Notes/indicators:			
Gender:	Male	Female	neither/both
Notes/indicators:			
SES:	Low /working	Middle	Upper
Notes/indicators:			

Unspoken underlying messages—passive ideologies and assumptions.
Guiding Notes:

Categorisation of Main Character for Ethnicity, Gender and SES.

Ethnicity
Indicators:
Note references to race or ethnicity.
Illustrations used as indicators of above.
Gender—male/female/neither/both
Indicators:
Gender noted through storyline and/or illustrations. Use of pronouns such as "he" "she" used in case of animal stories or inanimate characters.
SES—upper, middle, low/working, uncertain/not indicated.
Indicators:

Indicators of SES—language use, context use such as furniture, dress, home and nature of activities performed by characters
Adults with white-collar/blue collar positions
Linear/sequential routines or other

Categorisation of Secondary Characters for Ethnicity, Gender and SES.
Secondary characters selected and analysed only when more than one race included;
Chosen by ethnicity—if more than one of same ethnicity selected first to occur in either image or text—subjected to similar assessment as above.
Unspoken underlying messages—passive ideologies and assumptions.
Does the book affirm non-mainstream lifestyles and perspectives either covertly or overtly OR.
Does the book facilitate the internalisation of the ideologies and values of the dominant group (Freire 1970/1999).
Indicated either overtly or covertly by story and/or illustrations as below:

- Characters and actions; thoughts and feeling of the characters
- Furniture, dress, home and nature of activities performed by characters

Assessing Informational Texts

Information texts are analysed for:

Racial representation   E.g.: Chinese, Australian, mixed, etc.
Gender   male, female, both, neither.
SES   one or more, e.g. middle, lower, middle and lower, etc.
Minority/Dominant—this category classifies the overall viewpoint of the book, e.g. promoting authentic, contemporary, stereotypical or exotic viewpoints of races, ethnicities represented.

Classification of Majority/minority with room for comment, e.g. Out-dated.

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Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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