2021

The Exclusive White World of Preservice Teachers' Book Selection for the Classroom: Influences and Implications for Practice

Helen Adam
Edith Cowan University

Anne-Maree Hays
Edith Cowan University

Yvonne Urquhart
Edith Cowan University

The Exclusive White World of Preservice Teachers' Children's Book Selection for the Classroom: Influences and Implications for Practice

Helen Adam
Anne-Maree Hays
Yvonne Urquhart
Edith Cowan University

Abstract: This paper reports on a study of the children's book preferences of 82 Preservice teachers (PSTs) at one Western Australian University. The study found PSTs preferred older books published during their own childhood or earlier. Further, representation of people of colour was limited to only 8 of 177 titles listed by PSTs. Key influences on their preferences were their personal favourite books and those used by mentor teachers during practicum experience. The outcomes of this study have implications for curriculum development and implementation of Initial Teacher Education courses, and in turn, for equitable outcomes of the future students of PSTs.

Introduction

Few would question the importance of sharing books with children to assist in their literacy development. The practice of reading aloud and sharing books frequently with young children impacts positively on the development of their spoken vocabulary, verbal comprehension, future reading proficiency and long term educational outcomes (Fleer & Raban, 2005; Kara-Soteriou & Rose, 2008; Morgan, 2009; National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008; Vaahtoranta et al., 2018). Furthermore, exposure to high quality, inclusive children's literature can contribute to children's learning and social and emotional development in important ways including fostering a sense of identity and belonging for all children (Kara-Soteriou & Rose, 2008; O'Neil, 2010).

Given the central role that books play in early education and care (ECEC) of young children, it is incumbent upon educators to select high quality, inclusive literature to share with children in their care in order to maximise the benefits of book sharing for all children. In turn, Initial teacher Education courses should ensure that Preservice Teachers (PSTs) are adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills to know how to select inclusive books for the benefit of all of their future students.

This paper reports on a small study which investigated PSTs' reported children's literature preferences for use in classrooms, and the potential role of their teacher education course and professional practice experiences in these preferences.

Literature Review

Despite the widely known benefits of book sharing for young children, there is considerable evidence of disparity in these benefits for children from minority groups (McRae, et al, 2000; Fernaldet al, 2013; Fleer & Raban, 2005). Many researchers agree that

positive ways to address such inequity can be through the use of culturally appropriate resources, including books, and the promotion of role models from individuals' own cultural backgrounds (McRae, et al, 2000; Fleer & Raban, 2005). However, a number of studies have found that non-Western religions, minority groups, those with disabilities, and the perspectives of those from lower socioeconomic status are absent or negatively represented in children's literature selected for education settings (Adam, 2021;Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2020; Adam, Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2017, 2019; Bishop, 1997; Boutte et al., 2008; David, 2001; Roberts, 2005). Researchers argue that such inappropriate representation of diversity can lead to stereotypes and attitudes and these can continue into adulthood and contribute to continued inequity (Boutte et al., 2008; David, 2001; Roberts et al., 2005; Bishop, 1997).

This suggests a need for children to be exposed to books reflecting the diversity of society and the positive representation of minority groups. Furthermore, that careful and considered selection of inclusive literature could lead to more equitable outcomes of book sharing for all children and promote positive attitudes towards diversity while disrupting notions of stereotypes and prejudice.

Much of the decision making determining which books children have the opportunity to read or to have read to them is made by adults (Hill et al., 2011; Wilkinson, 2003). In education settings these are the educators of the children. The nature, quality and availability of literature may be impacted by educators' limited knowledge about the importance of diverse literature in children's lives and of how to select and evaluate such literature (Adam, Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2019; Brinson, 2012, Crisp et al., 2016). Others have found that a lack of diverse perspectives in literature texts shared with children is due to educators not considering 'White' to be a race (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015; Spina & Tai, 1998;) or as a "focus for critique and analysis" (Spina & Tai, 1998, p. 37). Such viewpoints influence the curricular choices made by educators.

Evidence shows that many adults, when selecting books for children, are strongly influenced by their own personal favourite books and these are often books that they read themselves or had read to them as children (Cremin et al., 2008; Marsh, 2004), resulting in "teachers' overdependence on a relatively narrow range of very well-known writers" (Cremin et al., 2008, p. 13). A further concern with educators selecting personal favourites from their own childhood, is the likely age of such books. Evidence suggests that many older books can promote outdated or stereotypical viewpoints of minority ethnic groups (Adam, 2019; David, 2001; Roberts, 2005) and that "*this is particularly disappointing when there is a dearth of recent publications which reflect the everyday lives of children from diverse cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds*" (Adam, 2019).

This evidence, therefore, has implications for the provision of Initial Teacher Education courses as they prepare educators to work in diverse contexts. A 2007 study involving 90 Canadian PSTs, most of whom were from the "largely white, European, English Speaking population" (Johnston et al., 2007. p. 77) examined their responses to 68 multicultural picture books. Johnston et al. found that the PSTs' preferences were for books which reflected perspectives and societal themes they were familiar with and reflecting their own spatio-temporal backgrounds (Johnston et al., 2007). This suggests that when educators select books based on their personal favourites or personal preferences, the result can be texts that present and reinforce the societal viewpoints of the educators themselves. In Australia, similar to the U.K., Canada and the U.S.A., the majority of early childhood educators and PSTs are from Anglo-European backgrounds (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2018; Hickling-Hudson, 2005; Johnston et al., 2007; Matias et al., 2017). Therefore, the books they select on the basis personal favourites or familiarity may be likely to reflect their societal viewpoints and ideologies.

Further, Mendoza and Reese (2001) suggest that some early childhood educators face enormous challenges in knowing how to source and evaluate the quality of diverse literature. Further, that this results in them selecting little or no literature representing the pluralistic nature of society. Similarly, other studies find that some early childhood educators have limited knowledge or understandings about multicultural literature and, as a result, many early childhood programs include very little literature that represents diversity (Adam 2021; Adam et al., 2017; Adam & Barratt-Pugh 2020; Brinson, 2012; Crisp et al., 2016).

A number of studies have shown that when diverse children's literature is intentionally included in teacher education courses it can assist in the development of PSTs' cultural competencies and understandings. Further, this inclusion of diverse texts will also assist in developing PSTs' understandings related to their own use of diverse literature in their future classroom practice (Daly & Blakeney-Williams, 2015; Johnston et al., 2007; Souto-Manning, 2009). The Children's Literature Assembly of the (US) National Council of Teachers of English calls on teacher education courses to "support preservice teachers as they build rich and deep knowledge of children's and young adult literature over the course of their certification programs" (Buehler et al., 2018).

Therefore, those responsible for teacher education have a responsibility to ensure that teacher education courses include appropriate training and instruction of PSTs in the selection and use of diverse children's literature. However, little is known about how teacher education courses worldwide, including in Australia, support PSTs' selection and use of diverse children's literature. Therefore, it is timely to consider the nature of the books likely to be selected by PSTs for use in education settings, including those promoted within teacher education courses by teacher educators and mentor teachers as being appropriate for classroom use. An understanding of this will contribute to the effective preparation and in-service training of educators who work with children and, in turn, will contribute to effective and equitable book sharing in classrooms.

The Problem

Little is known about what children's literature texts PSTs are likely to select for their own future classroom practice and how their initial teacher education (ITE) course and professional practice experience might impact on their selection of children's literature. Given the importance of critical and informed selection of texts for the children they will teach in their career, it is important to consider the nature of children's literature texts PSTs are likely to select and whether course and professional experiences influence these choices.

This Study

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 for this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through two surveys and descriptive analysis was used to describe, aggregate and present the constructs and the associations between them.

Defining Diversity in the Context of this Paper

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. 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 aspects are closely related and can be grouped broadly under race and culture.

Bishop, whose research in excess of 30 years in multicultural literature is arguably among the most seminal work in this field, argues that "race or colour is one of the most, if not *the* most divisive issues in society" (1997, p. 3). Bishop's approaches to assessing the portrayal of race have remained constant for over 25 years and other researchers been found these to be effective (Adam &Barratt-Pugh, 2020; Crisp et al., 2016).

Therefore, the focus within this paper is *race* as identified through skin colour. In line with the work of Bishop, in this study, the terms 'people of colour' and 'characters that were people of colour' are used.

Background to the Study

The data presented in this study was collected as part of teaching and learning experiences in a unit of study as detailed in this section. As such, this was not a formally designed research study (see limitations section). Rather, the authors identified that the patterns presented in this data are of significance to the field of Initial Teacher Education and so sought to interrogate and report on the data through an investigative lens. Use of this data for research purposes was granted by (institution removed for peer review).

The authors of this study are Initial Teacher Education academics who specialise in English education and at the time of data collection, all taught into core English units in the Bachelor of Primary Education at the same Western Australian University. Author one is also the coordinator of a 4th year elective unit called *Children's literature in the classroom*. This unit is offered across both the four-year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) and Bachelor of Education (Primary) at the same Western Australian University. Both Authors Two and Three were research assistants on this paper, with Author Two also teaching into this unit at the time of this study.

PSTs in the two Bachelor of Education courses undertake four core units related the teaching of English. These English units are all completed by the end of the third year of study. At the time of data collection, PSTs in their final year of study selected from a range of elective units, one of which was the children's literature in the classroom unit. At the time of this study approximately 10% of PSTs in their final year of study in these two courses elected to take this unit. As part of the teaching and learning processes of the unit, PSTs are surveyed prior to commencing the unit content in order to understand what children's books they are likely to select for their classroom practice after completing the core units of study and professional experience in their Initial Teacher Education course, and to what extent PSTs' book choices reflect the diversity of society.

Research Questions

1.   What is the nature of children's books PSTs report as being their preferred books to use in classroom practice?
2.   How frequently are the preferred texts also texts the PSTs have been exposed to in their Initial Teacher Education course?
3.   How frequently are the preferred texts also texts PSTs know from personal experience or preference?
4.   To what extent is representation of diversity reflected in the children's book preferences of PSTs?

Methodology
Data Collection

Data were collected through two surveys undertaken in the first two classes of a 4th year elective unit called *Children's literature in the classroom*, which was part of two undergraduate education courses at a Western Australian University. The data were collected as part of the teaching and learning processes of the unit prior to students commencing the content of the unit in order to gain insight to PSTs' understandings of selecting children's literature based on their personal experience with children's books and the core curriculum of their teacher education degree.

This unit was undertaken by 82 PSTs after completing all core units in their course relating to the teaching of English. Table 1 shows the distribution of these PSTs across two courses, the Bachelor of Education (Primary) and the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood). Table 1 also shows the semester of study in which the PSTs were at the time of data collection.

Bachelor of Education Course	Final Semester	Second to final semester	Third to final Semester	Total Students
Primary	14	30	2	**46**
Early Childhood	19	17	0	**36**
Totals	**33**	**47**	**2**	**82**

Table 1: PSTs' Course Details

In addition, to having completed all core English units these PSTs had also collectively completed over 260 practicum placements in schools, with all bar two of the PSTs having completed between 80 and 120 practicum days during their course (the remaining two had completed two placements totalling 40 days). While demographic information was not collected for these PSTs, AITSL statistics on the demographics of PSTs at the time of this study showed that PSTs from non-English speaking backgrounds made up only 2% of all Initial Teacher Education students in Australia (AITSL, 2018) and course enrolment data confirmed that that ECU PST demographics were consistent with those reported by AITSL.

For the purpose of this paper these PSTs have been used as a purposeful sample of PSTs from the Bachelor of Education courses in primary and early childhood education at one Western Australian university.

Data were collected through two surveys, both of which were administered at the beginning of the children's literature unit prior to engaging in any unit content. In the first survey, PSTs were required to list titles of children's literature texts they recalled being used during their course up until the commencement of the children's literature unit, this included

books used by themselves, other PSTs, Teacher Educators or by mentor teachers while on practicum. The rationale for investigating these particular course related aspects is due to the evidence of the role that Initial Teacher Education courses can play in exposing PSTs to children's literature. PSTs were also asked to specifically list the books they were likely to select for classroom practice (Appendix A). Titles were collated alphabetically by title on large sheets of butcher paper, a tallying notation was used to count the number of PSTs who had listed each text. The collated sheets were collected by the researcher and students retained their individual lists.

A second survey was then completed by PSTs (see Appendix B). This was designed to collect specific information regarding the individual titles they had listed in the first survey.

Information collected in the second survey included which texts were those they would prefer to use in their classroom practice, which texts they had been exposed to in their course and who had used these – Teacher Educators, the PSTs themselves, or other PSTs and, which texts they recalled being used by mentor teachers while on practicum.

PSTs were instructed that while the second survey contained all titles that had been listed by the complete cohort in the initial survey, they were to record data only for those books they had personally listed in the initial survey. PSTs referred to their survey one lists as they completed the second survey. While these surveys were anonymous, PSTs also provided demographic data relating to their course title and the semester they were enrolled in at the time.

Survey data was collated into an excel spreadsheet along with further data collected by Author Two through accessing the publication details of the books on the collated list. This included: author names, publisher, country of publication, year of publication, and awards (including shortlisting) given to the books. Additional columns were included for the researchers to note any books that contained characters of colour and, for these, whether they were main characters, secondary characters involved in the story, or background characters in pictures only. The Collation Spreadsheet is included as Appendix C.

It is important to note that Dr Seuss books were listed both as a collective (i.e. Dr Seuss books) and as some individual titles. We have reported the data as collected from the students to preserve the authenticity of the study. However, when analysing for diversity we looked at the individual titles listed.

Data Analysis
Most Preferred Books

The overall data were initially sorted by the PSTs' Preferred Texts for Classroom Use. These were ranked according to the number of PSTs who nominated each text as a preferred text. In order to select a manageable data sample purposeful sample was then taken of the books. The criterion for this sample was all books listed by more than 10% of the PSTs.

Given the evidence outlined in the literature review showing that older books are potentially being more likely to reflect outdated viewpoints and stereotypes of minority groups, this sample was divided into decades by publication date and comparisons were made between age of the books, the number of books and the number of listings by PSTs.

Comparison of Course and Personal Factors with Preferred Texts

Secondary analysis was undertaken by sorting the spreadsheet of overall data to identify the frequency of PSTs identifying the surveyed course and personal factors occurring

for the books they had listed as preferred for classroom use. At this point it was evident that none of the PSTs had listed any titles as titles they had used themselves during the course. The factors confirmed by PSTs were - used in course by Educators, used in course by other PSTs, used by mentor teacher on practicum, and personal experience/favourite books.

Diversity in the Books

The authors analysed the overall data to identify books portraying representation of characters that were people of colour. For the purpose of this study, the work of Bishop was followed in order to categorise human representation in children's literature using skin colour (Bishop, 1997; Adam et al., 2017; Crisp et al., 2016). This was a simple visual analysis of the images in the books to identify whether, and to what extent, people of colour were portrayed in the books listed. Further analysis identified whether these were main characters, secondary characters involved in the story, or background characters in the pictures only. These were also analysed to identify the surveyed course or personal factors. Interrater reliability showed 100% agreement.

The Top Ten Most Preferred Books

The top ten most preferred books were then selected for closer reporting for this paper. Rationale for focusing on these top ten books was that they had been nominated by 35% or more of the PSTs (range 35%-66%).

Books shared by Teacher Educators

Further analysis was carried out to identify the nature of texts that were PSTs had identified as used in the course by Teacher Educators.

Results
Book Preferences of the PSTs

In total, 177 different titles were listed by PSTs as books they were likely to select for their future classroom use. The number of times a book was listed by individual PSTs ranged from one listing (34 titles) to 54 listings (one title).

Titles nominated by more than 10% (N= 59) of PSTs were grouped by first publication date and arranged into decades since publication up to 70 years. Titles with a first publication date of 80 or more years were grouped together. The number of listings for each decade was extracted and an average number of listing per title in each decade was calculated. Table 2 shows the distribution of these book titles by years since publication along with the number of listings and average number of title listings per decade of publication.

Years since first published	<10	10- <20	20-<30	30<40	40<50	50<60	60<70	70<80	80+
Number of titles	10	9	13	11	5	3	1	2	5
Number of listings	138	122	284	237	138	95	11	31	65
Av listing per book	14	14	22	22	28	32	11	16	13

Table 2: Age and listings of the books listed by >10% of PSTs

Course Exposure and Personal Favourites in the Book Preferences of the PSTS

The data was then sorted by the four surveyed factors to gauge the potential links between PSTs' preferred texts, the books that PSTs had been exposed to in their course and those which were personal favourites. The number of titles identified as preferred texts were compared with the four surveyed factors to identify any patterns of association. Some titles had two or three of the course related or personal factors of equal frequency. Table 3 shows the surveyed factors alongside the number of titles linked to that factor. The final column shows how many of those titles scored equal frequency with one or more other factors.

Factor	Number of titles	Subset scoring equally with another factor/s
A: Personal favourite/experiences	100	21
B: Mentor Teacher	76	27
C: In course by Teacher Educators	22	11
D: In course by fellow PSTs	7	4

Table 3: Possible linked factors and number of titles.

The subset of titles that titles scored equal frequency for multiple factors and the number of titles for which each combination occurred are shown in Table 4.

Combination of factors	Number of titles
A+B **:** Personal favourite/experiences AND Mentor Teacher	17
A+C: Personal favourite/experiences AND In course by Teacher Educators	1
A+D: Personal favourite/experiences AND In course by fellow PSTs	1
B+C: Mentor Teacher AND In course by Teacher Educators	9
B+D: Mentor Teacher AND In course by fellow PSTs	0
C+D: In course by Teacher Educators AND In course by fellow PSTs	1
A+B+C: Personal favourite/experiences AND Mentor Teacher AND In course by Teacher Educators	1
A+C+D: Personal favourite/experiences AND In course by Teacher Educators AND Fellow PSTs	1
B+C+D: Mentor Teacher AND In course by Teacher Educators AND In course by fellow PSTs	0
A+B+C+D: All fours possible factors	0

Table 4: Combination of factors and number of titles.

Cultural Diversity in the Books Listed

The analysis of any human representation in the images of the 177 books listed on the initial survey by PSTs showed only eight books (4.5%) portraying people of colour. In only four of these books was there a main character who was a person of colour. While a further one of these eight books, *Possum Magic* was an animal story, it did show representation of a person of colour in one illustration on one page. These eight books and information relating to how many PSTs nominated them as well as the nature of the diverse representation are shown in Table 5.

Book	No and % of PSTs	Main character/s	Secondary Character/s	In pictures only (not mentioned in story)
Possum Magic	54 (66%)	No	No	Yes
The Little Refugee	16 (18.5%)	Yes	Yes	
Handa's Surprise	13 (16%)	Yes	Yes	
Are We There Yet?	10 (12%)	No	Yes	Yes
Mirror	4 (5%)	Yes	Yes	
Ernie Dances to the Didgeridoo	2 (2.5%)	No	Yes	
Stolen Girl	1 (1.2%)	Yes	Yes	
Ziba Came on a Boat	1 (1.2%)	Yes	Yes	

Table 5: Books* containing some representation of characters that were people of colour
* Full publication details in Appendix C

The Top Ten Books Most Likely to be Selected By PSTS for Classroom use

Information relating to the books nominated by 35% or more PSTs was extracted for further analysis, this resulted in the selection of the top ten most preferred books. Table 6 shows the top ten children's books identified by PSTs as books they would like to use in their practice, and the number and percentage of PSTs who listed each title. The original year of publication and whether each book had won or been shortlisted for book awards are also included.

Book Title (Author)*	First published	Award Winner/ Shortlist	Number of PSTs who listed	% of PSTs who listed (to nearest %)
Possum Magic (Mem Fox)	1983	Yes	54	66%
The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Eric Carle)	1969	Yes	50	61%
The Rainbow Fish (Markus Pfister)	1992	Yes	46	56%
We're Going on a Bear Hunt (Michael Rosen)	1989	Yes	44	54%
Dr Seuss books (Dr Seuss)	1957	Yes	41	50%
Matilda (Roald Dahl)	1988	Yes	36	44%
Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy (Lynley Dodd)	1983	Yes	33	40%
Wombat Stew (Mem Fox)	1984	Yes	32	39%
Rosie's Walk (Pat Hutchins)	1968	Yes	31	38%
Where the Wild Things Are (Maurice Sendak)	1963	Yes	29	35%

Table 6: The top ten children's preferred children's books* for future classroom practice.
*Full publication details in Appendix D

The three surveyed course related factors plus the factor of personal experience/favourite were then extracted for each of these ten books. Figure 1 shows the number of PSTs who listed each factor for each of the top ten preferred texts.
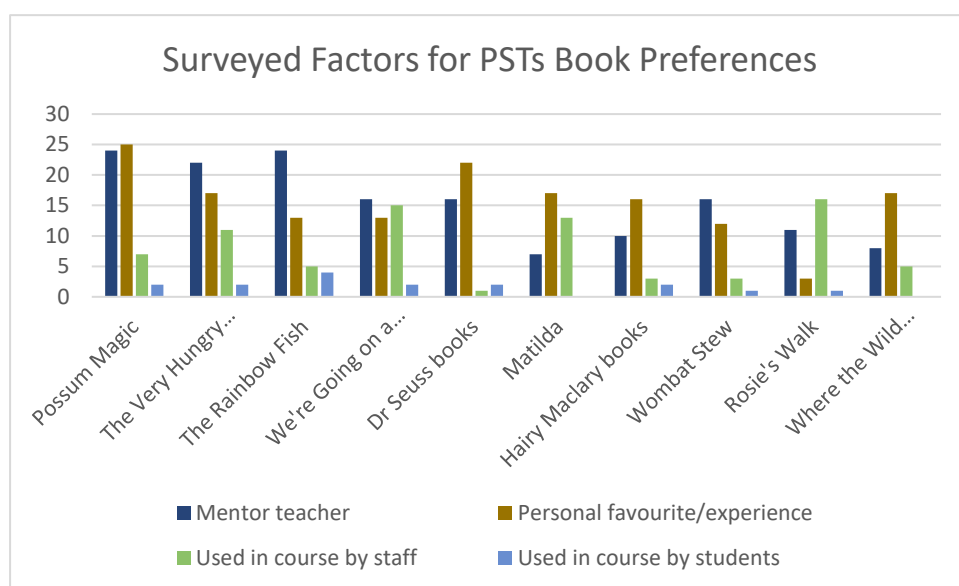

Figure 1: The four surveyed factors for the PSTs' preferred children's books

Despite five of the top ten preferred children's books containing some human representation, either as character in the story or in the illustrations, only one of these books, *Possum Magic,* contained any portrayal of a people of colour character and this was only in one illustration.

Books used by Teacher Educators

Sixty nine of the 177 (39%) books were identified by PSTs as books they had seen used in the course by Teacher Educators. Eighteen (26%) of these books were listed as books that students would select for their future practice.

The age of these books by decade since publication is shown in the table below.

Years since first published	<10	<20	<30	<40	<50	<60	<70	<80	80+
No. of titles	14	12	19	8	6	5	1	0	4

Table 7: Age of the books listed as being used by Teacher Educators in the course

Eight of these books were also in the list of the top ten titles preferred by the PSTs for their future classroom practice (See Table 6).

Three of these 69 books contained some representation of characters of colour (see Table 5).

Discussion

The results from this small study raise some significant concerns for the nature of book selection for the future classroom practice of PSTs.

Less than 16% of the titles listed had been published in the ten years prior to the study. Collectively, this suggests that many of these books were likely to reflect outdated viewpoints and lifestyles. Therefore, given the increasing diversity of 21st Century Australian classrooms, many children would be unlikely to see their worlds, or their families, cultures and lifestyles reflected.

Adding to this concern, is that PSTs were far more likely to list older books than more recently published books (see Table 1). A powerful example of this is that three books between 50 and 60 years since publication were listed by an average of 32 (39%) of the PSTs, this is almost 150% more listings for these three books than the most recently published books.

The possible linked factors for these books go some way to explaining the reasons for this domination of older books. The PSTs' personal experience/favourite books were the leading factor in their selection of titles for future classroom use. This suggests that many of the books these PSTs had grown up with as children were the texts they would choose to use in their own teaching. This is supported by the age of many of the books listed with many having publication dates from when the majority of PSTs would have been children[1]. Many others were published when those likely to have read to these PSTs as children, their own parents and teachers, would have been children. This links closely to the findings of others (Cremin et al., 2008; Marsh, 2004). Further, in line with the work of Johnston et al. (2007), it appeared that these PSTs, overwhelmingly favoured books which were likely to present societal themes and perspectives familiar to themselves and reflective of their own backgrounds. The lack of diversity in the books listed not only supports the suggestion that the PSTs select books that reflected their own familiar experiences and viewpoints but adds weight to the concerns for the potential impact on the future students of the PSTs.

The role of mentor teachers in exposing PSTs to titles was also considerable and, given that the majority of teachers in Australia, like those from the U.K, Canada and the U.S are from Anglo-European backgrounds (Hickling-Hudson, 2005; Johnston et al., 2007; Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo, 2017), it would appear from these results that the books the mentor teachers were using were likely to have been selected based on their own personal favourites or preferences. Cremin et al (2008) found that classroom teachers are highly likely to use in their own classroom the children's books they enjoyed themselves as children, and the evidence in this study suggests this may be the case with the mentor teachers who shared books with the PSTs in this study. Once again, this is concerning as this, too, results in the use of books that present and reinforce the societal viewpoints of the educators themselves and reflect their own dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies. The overwhelming lack of diversity found in the books listed in this study adds to this argument.

Teacher Educators appeared to be a lesser factor than PSTs' own preferences and mentor teachers. However, it is important to note that among the books in which use by Teacher Educators was a factor, there was a slightly higher proportion (20%) of books published in the previous ten years than among those reported used by mentor teachers (<16%). This may indicate an awareness among Teacher Educators of sourcing more recently published books.

However, it is also concerning to note that only three books reported as used by Teacher Educators had any representation of people of colour. In addition, eight of the top ten

---

[1] At the time of this study, university data showed the average age of PSTs to be 26 years old

books listed by PSTs as those they would use in their practice, were in part linked to the PSTs having seen these used by Teacher Educators during their course. While the nature of book use by Teacher Educators has not been investigated in this study, the age of, and the lack of diverse representation in, these books suggests that an opportunity may exist for more considered and explicit use of diverse books by Teacher Educators.

These combined factors highlight the importance of PSTs having access to, and knowledge of, a wide, varied and contemporary selection of children's literature. PSTs become the mentor teachers for future generations of PSTs and, as this study suggests, mentor teachers have an impact on PSTs' own knowledge of children's literature.

The top ten most preferred children's literature texts listed by the PSTs had several striking similarities. All were arguably older books being at least 25 years old at the time of the surveys with publication dates ranging from 1957-1992. All had been shortlisted and most had won one or more book awards. Six of these books were animal stories with no human characters (n=5) or human characters only evident in pictures (n=1) while the other four contained only Caucasian human characters.

The prominence of animal stories in the top ten reflects similar findings from other studies showing that approximately 50% of books in many early learning settings are animal stories (Adam et al., 2017; Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2019; Marriott 2002). Evidence also suggests that some educators assume that the use of anthropomorphised animal stories can support children's understandings of social problems and issues (Richert et al., 2009; Richert & Smith, 2011,). However, there is evidence that this assumption may be flawed, with content analysis of anthropomorphised books (Borkfelt, 2011; Boutte et al., 2008) suggesting that activities, viewpoints and lifestyles of anthropomorphised characters in these stories usually reflect those of the majority culture. Other studies show that the roles played by animals can also be typecast or stereotyped and this can thus reinforce notions of inferiority or superiority (Borkfelt, 2011; Dunn, 2011). Another concern with the prominence of animal stories is that this further decreases the likelihood of children from minority backgrounds seeing characters similar to themselves. Evidence from the Cooperative Children's Book Centre (CCBC) suggest that children from ethnic minority groups are more likely to see main characters that are dinosaurs or rabbits than they are to see a character from their own culture (CCBC, 2017).

The authors do not suggest that older books or animal stories have no place in today's classroom. Many of these, including the Top Ten books, are considered high quality classic literature with strong storylines and good use of language and literary devices and portray positive messages for children. However, as with the other evidence presented in this paper, if the classroom book choices by future PSTs are overwhelmingly reflecting dominant culture and outdated viewpoints and lifestyles the potential impact on children could be detrimental to equitable educational and social outcomes. While classic books arguably have a place within the classroom, it is essential that this takes place alongside more contemporary texts that better represent the diversity of society.

Worth noting, too is the body of evidence that argues Dr Seuss books portray minority cultures in stereotypical or exotic ways and often in subservient roles to white characters (Ishizuka & Stephens, 2019; Nel, 2014, 2017). While the specific Dr Seuss titles analysed in this study did not contain portrayal of people of colour, it was not possible to ascertain whether the top ten listing of "Dr Seuss books" could include books in which there is negative portrayal of people of colour.

Perhaps the greatest concern emerging from this study is the lack of diversity in the books listed by PSTs, including those modelled to them by mentor teachers and Teacher Educators. When children's own worlds are invisible in the books shared with them emotions including doubt, anxiety or even fear can result and impact on their wellbeing (Adam et al.,

2019; Dunlap, 2012). If the patterns found in this study represent the book choices of practising and future educators then children from minority backgrounds in the classrooms may receive little or even no exposure to accurate, authentic role models or representations that reflect their own cultural, linguistic and social backgrounds. The impact of this invisibility can lead to challenges for these children, both intellectually and emotionally, when participating in the curriculum (Jones-Diaz & Harvey, 2002; Morgan, 2009). For children from the majority dominant culture who may only see "reflections of themselves" (Bishop, 1997) this could risk them perceiving their own culture as superior or normal.

Conclusion

The PSTs in this study went on to complete a full semester specialist unit on children's literature which exposed them to a wide range of contemporary children's books, challenged them with explorations and discussion of diverse perspective and explored criteria for selecting children's books for their future practice. However, this study raises the question – what of the majority of PSTs who do not take a specialist literature unit such as this unit? At the time of this study 90% of PSTs in the courses did not take a specialist children's literature unit, and since the study was undertaken this proportion has increased even further. If the results of this study reflect typical selection preferences of PSTs after completing their core course, then as outlined in this paper, the implications for their future students could be grave.

Further, given the nature of children's books seen used by mentor teachers, who by implication have completed teacher education courses themselves, it would appear that it is incumbent upon teacher education courses to ensure that PSTs receive appropriate training in the selection and use of diverse and contemporary children's literature. Further, it would appear that this would need to be explicit and considered rather than incidental exposure to books during the course.

All children are disadvantaged when genuine diversity is not reflected or considered. Failure to select books reflecting our diverse society in authentic and contemporary ways potentially create an environment in which the complex and multifaceted aspects of power, inclusivity and representation are avoided. This can contribute to a 'silence' depriving children of opportunities to actively engage with children's literature "to move between local and global cultures and to explore the ways in which people live and think in cultures that differ from our own" (Short, 2012, p. 9). Therefore, it is essential that graduate teachers leave their teacher education course fully prepared and ready to select and implement diverse children's literature in their classroom practice.

Limitations and Recommendations

As this study was undertaken as part of the teaching and learning processes of a unit of study, it may not be reflective of a wider cohort of PSTs. Future studies could employ more refined survey instruments and participants be extended to include those who do not undertake such a specialist unit. A future study could incorporate a formal post survey on completion of the unit to evaluate the impact of the specialist unit. Future studies could also include surveying mentor teachers and Teacher Educators in order to enhance the depth and outcomes of the study.

The analysis of the diversity in the books was a simple image analysis based on skin colour of characters. Future studies could extend analysis to a more comprehensive

investigation of the authenticity of the cultural representation in the books such as those undertaken by Boutte et al. (2008) and Adam and Barratt-Pugh (2020). Future studies could also investigate other aspects of diversity such as family, gender, ability and socio-economic status.

A further limitation of this study is that it was confined to Initial Teacher Education courses within one university. However, the results of this study echo similar findings among PSTs (Johnston et al., 2007) and those investigating practising educators (Adam et al., 2019; Brinson, 2012, Crisp et al., 2016). Thus, this study contributesto the body of knowledge in this field. Future studies could focus on ITE courses across multiple universities.

The authors note that since this study was undertaken, they have incorporated intentional changes to core English units in the teacher education courses at their university to include investigation of, and exposure to, diverse contemporary children's books and have included selection and use of children's books by PSTs into assessment processes of the units. A follow up study will investigate the impact of these changes.

References

Adam, H. J. (2019). Cultural diversity and children's literature: Kindergarten educators' practices to support principles of cultural diversity through book sharing. Edith Cowan University, Edith Cowan University, Research Online, Perth, Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, Retrieved from https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/2245 WorldCat.org database.

Adam, H. (2021). When Authenticity Goes Missing: How Monocultural Children's Literature Is Silencing the Voices and Contributing to Invisibility of Children from Minority Backgrounds. *Education Sciences, 11*(32). https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11010032

Adam, H., Barratt-Pugh, C., & Haig, Y. (2017). Book collections in long day care: Do they reflect racial diversity*? Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 42*(2), 88-96. https://doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.42.2.11

Adam, H., Barratt-Pugh, C., & Haig, Y. (2019). "Portray cultures other than ours": How children's literature is being used to support the diversity goals of the Australian Early Years Learning Framework. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00302-w

Adam, H., Barratt-Pugh, C. (2020) The Challenge of Monoculturalism – What books are educators sharing with children and what messages do they send? *Australian Educational Researcher, 47*, 815-836. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00375-7

Adair J.K., Colegrove K.S.S. & McManus M. (2017) How the word gap argument negatively impacts young children of Latinx immigrants' conceptualizations of learning. *Harvard Educational Review 87*(3), 309–334. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-87.3.309

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, (2018). *ITE Data Report 2018.* Retrieved from https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/ite-datareport-2018#Summary-of-key-findings--section

Bishop, R. S. (1997). Selecting literature for a multicultural curriculum. In V. J. Harris (Ed.), *Using multi-ethnic literature in the K-8 classroom* (pp. 1-20). Christopher-Gordon.

Boutte, G. S., Hopkins, R., & Waklatsi, T. (2008). Perspectives, voices, and worldviews in frequently read children's books. *Early education and development, 19*(6), 941-962. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280802206643

Borkfelt, S. (2011). Non-human Otherness: Animals as others and devices for Othering. In S. Sencindiver, Y. M. Beville, & M. Lauritzen (Eds.), *Otherness: A multilateral perspective* (pp. 137-154). Peter Lang.

Brinson, S. A. (2012). Knowledge of multicultural literature among early childhood educators. *Multicultural Education, 19*(2), 30.

Buchori, S., & Dobinson, T. (2015). Diversity in teaching and learning: Practitioners' perspectives in a multicultural early childhood setting in Australia. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 40,* 71+. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911504000110

Buehler, J., Davila, D., McClure, A., & Miller, D. (2018). *Preparing Teachers with Knowledge of Children's and Young Adult Literature*. Children's Literature Assembly: https://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/resources.html

Cremin, T., Bearne, E., Mottram, M., & Goodwin, P. (2008). Primary teachers as readers. *English in Education*, *42*(1), 8-23. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-8845.2007.00001.x

Cooperative Children's Book Center. (2017). CCBC 2017 Multicultural Statistics. Retrieved from *Social Justice Books: A Teaching for change project* website: https://socialjusticebooks.org/ccbc-2017-multicultural-statistics/

Crisp, T., Knezek, S. M., Quinn, M., Bingham, G. E., Girardeau, K., & Starks, F. (2016). What's on our bookshelves? The Diversity of Children's Literature in Early Childhood Classroom Libraries. *Journal of Children's Literature, 42*(2), 29-42.

Daly, N. Blakeney-Williams, M.M. (2015). Picturebooks in teacher education: Eight teacher educators share their practice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *40*(3), 89-101. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v40n3.6

David, R. G. (2001). Representing the Inuit in Contemporary British and Canadian Juvenile Non-Fiction. *Children's literature in education, 32*(2), 139-154. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010338629474

Deakin University Definitions (Producer) (2019). *Deakin University Definitions*. Deakin University Australia. Retrieved from http://www.deakin.edu.au/equity-diversity/definitions.php

Dunn, E., A., (2011). Talking Animals: A literature review of anthropomorphism in children's books. (Master of Science in Library Science Master's Paper).Carolina Digital Repository

Dunlap, M (2012), "Thriving in a multicultural classroom." In C.P. Harvey & M.J. Allard (Eds.), *Understanding and managing diversity* (5th ed. pp. 12-21). Pearson/Prentice Hall.Fernald, A., Marchman, V. A., & Weisleder, A. (2013). SES differences in language processing skill and vocabulary are evident at 18 months. *Developmental Science, 16*(2), 234-248. https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.120199

Fleer, B., & Raban, B. (2005). *Literacy and numeracy that counts from birth to five years: a review of the literature*. DEST, Early Childhood Learning Resources.

Hickling-Hudson, A. (2005). 'White', 'Ethnic' and 'Indigenous': Pre-service teachers reflect on discourses of ethnicity in Australian culture. *Policy Futures in Education*, *3*(4), 340-358. https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2005.3.4.340

Hill, S., Colbung, M., & Glover, A. (2011). My favourite book! Young Aboriginal children's book choices. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, *36*(1), 77-84. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911103600113

Ishizuka, K., & Stephens, R. (2019). The Cat is out of the bag Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr Seuss's children's books. *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*, *1*(2), 1-50.

Johnston, Ingrid; Bainbridge, Joyce and Shariff, Farha. Exploring Issues of National Identity, Ideology and Diversity in Contemporary Canadian Picture Books [online]. Papers: *Explorations into Children's Literature*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Dec 2007: 75-83.

Jones-Diaz, C., & Harvey, N. E. (2002). Other words other worlds: Bilingual identities and literacy. In L. Makin & C. Jones-Diaz (Eds.), *Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice*. MacLennan and Petty.

Kara-Soteriou, J., & Rose, H. (2008). A Bat, a snake, a cockroach, and a fuzzhead: Using children's literature to teach about positive character traits. *Young Children, 63*(4), 30-36.

Marriott, S. (2002). Red in tooth and claw? Images of nature in modern picture books. *Children's Literature in Education*, *33,* 175–183. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1019677931406

Marsh, J. (2004). The primary canon: A critical review. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *52*(3), 249-262. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2004.00266.x

Matias, C. E., Nishi, N. W., & Sarcedo, G. L. (2017). Teacher education and Whiteness in teacher education in the United States. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.279

McRae, D., Ainsworth, G., Cumming, J., Hughes, P., Mackay, T., Price, K., Rowland, M., Warhurst, J., Woods, D., Zbar, V. (2000). *What works? Explorations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students.* Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs.

Mendoza, J. & Reese, D. (2001). Examining multicultural picture books for the early childhood classroom: Possibilities and pitfalls. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, *3*(2), 1-31.

Morgan, H. (2009). Gender, racial and ethnic misrepresentation in children's books. A comparative look. *Childhood Education, 85*(3), 187-190. https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2009.10521389

National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). Developing early literacy: *Report of the national early literacy panel*. National Institute for Literacy.

Nel, P. (2017). *Was the Cat in the hat black? The hidden racism of children's literature and the need for diverse books*. Oxford University Press.

O'Neil, K. (2010). Once upon today: Teaching for social justice with postmodern picturebooks. *Children's Literature in Education, 41*(1), 40-51. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-009-9097-9

Richert, R. A., Shawber, A. B., Hoffman, R. E., & Taylor, M. (2009). Learning from fantasy and real characters in preschool and kindergarten. *Journal of Cognition and Development*, *10 (*1/2), 41. https://doi.org/10.1080/15248370902966594

Richert, R. A., & Smith, E. I. (2011). Preschoolers' quarantining of fantasy stories. *Child Development,* 82(4), 1106. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01603.x

Roberts, L. C. D., Eliza; Holland, Marna. (2005). Contemporary American Indian cultures in children's picture books. *Young Children on the Web,* November.

Spina, S. U., & Tai, R. H. (1998). The politics of racial identity: A pedagogy of invisibility. *Educational Researcher*, *27*(1), 36-48. https://doi.org/10.2307/1176926

Vaahtoranta, E., Suggate, S., Jachmann, C., Lenhart, J., & Lenhard, W. (2018). Can explaining less be more? Enhancing vocabulary through explicit versus elaborative storytelling. *First Language*, *38*(2), 198-217. https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723717737452

Wilkinson, K. (2003). Children's favorite books. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, *3*(3), 275-301. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798403033004

Appendix A Tutorial Survey One Instructions
Survey One Instructions

1.   Individually make a list of children's books you recall being used throughout your Initial Teacher Education course including those used by teaching staff, fellow students, yourself, or mentor teachers while on prac.

2.   Now make a list of books you would select for use in the classroom yourself, this may include titles on your first list and/or other books.

3.   Now take your list and copy the titles onto the alphabetical sheets on the wall. Check first to see if the title is already there – if so, put a tick next to it.

Appendix B.
Survey Two: Influences on Book Listings

The table below collates the titles of books identified in Survey One as children's books you each recall as used during your course in classes or on teaching pracs, as well as books you would like to use in your own practice.
For each title, please indicate in Column 2 whether the book was one of those you listed.
For those you indicated **Yes** in Column 1, please complete the other columns where relevant either using ticks or Yes/No and adding further information where relevant. Tick/comment in as many columns as relevant for each book.
If a title was not one you listed in Survey One, then simply put No in Column 2 and move to the next title.

Book title* *the 177 book titles from Survey1 were listed in this column	Yes/No – did you list this book	Used in Course by Teaching Staff	Used in Course by self	Used in Course by fellow PST	Used on prac by Mentor Teacher	Personal experience/favourite: This book is a personal favourite book to you	Personal selection – books you would use in your classroom

Appendix C: Collation of Data Spreadsheet

Book Details						People of colour				Listings	Surveyed Factors - No. for each				Preferred
Title	Author	Publication Date	Publisher	Country of pub.	Award/ Shortlist	People of colour	Main Cha.	Sec Char.	Pictures only	No. of times listed By PSTs	Used by Fellow PSTs	Used by self	Used by Mentor Tchr	Personal Fav/exp	Preferred for classroom use.

Appendix D: Publication Details of Children's Books Listed in this Paper

Baker J. (2010). *Mirror.* Candlewick Books.

Browne, E. (1995). *Handa's surprise.* Walker Books.

Carle, E. (1969). *The very hungry caterpillar.* World Publishing Company.

Dahl, R. (1988). *Matilda.* Jonathan Cape.

Do, A., (2011). *The little refugee.* Allen & Unwin.

Dodd, L. (1983) *Hairy McClary from Donaldson's Dairy.* Mallinson Rendel Publishers Limited.

Fox, M., & Vivas, J. (1983). *Possum magic* (New). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Hutchins, P. (1968). *Rosie's Walk.* MacMillan.

Lester, E. (2004). *Are we there yet?* Penguin Australia Pty Ltd.

Lester, A. (2000). *Ernie dances to the didgeridoo.* Hodder Headline Australia Pty Ltd.

Lofthouse, L. (2007). *Ziba came on a boat.* Lofthouse books.

Pfister, M. (1992). *The rainbow fish.* North South Books.

Rosen, M. (1989). *We're going on a bear hunt.* Walker Books.

Sendak, M. (1963). *Where the wild things are.* Harper & Row.

Seuss, Dr. (various dates) Various Titles. Random House.

Saffioti, T., & MacDonald, N., (2011). *Stolen girl.* Magabala Books.

Vaughan, M. K., & Lofts, P. (2009). *Wombat stew*. Ashton Scholastic.