

Children's Literature Across the Curriculum: An Ontario Survey

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In this article, I have presented findings from survey data to describe elementary teachers' and teacher-librarians' use of various genres of children's literature and their use of children's literature in specific curriculum areas. Data analysis revealed that teachers and teacher-librarians most frequently used the genres of non-fiction, realistic fiction, and fantasy in their teaching. They used children's literature in language and social studies to a greater extent than in other curricular areas. In general, teachers' and teacher-librarians' use of Canadian literature was limited. I have concluded the article with a discussion of the importance of national literature in Canadian classrooms.

Keywords: Canadian children's literature, Ontario elementary teachers and teacher-librarians, national literature, resource-based instruction

Cet article porte sur les résultats de l'enquête qui décrivent l'usage fait par les enseignants du primaire et les enseignants-bibliothécaires de plusieurs genres de littérature de jeunesse, ainsi que leur usage dans des parties spécifiques du curriculum. L'analyse des données démontre que les enseignants et les enseignants-bibliothécaires utilisent plus souvent les ouvrages du genre non-fictionnel, réaliste et fantastique dans leur enseignement. Ils utilisent la littérature de jeunesse plutôt dans les sciences humaines et les langues que dans les autres parties du curriculum. En général, les enseignants et les enseignants-bibliothécaires utilisent la littérature canadienne de façon restreinte. Cet article se termine avec une discussion sur l'importance de la littérature nationale dans la salle de classe canadienne.

Mots-clés : littérature de jeunesse canadienne, enseignants du primaire et enseignants-bibliothécaires en Ontario, littérature nationale, apprentissage fondé sur le matériel didactique

In a substantial body of research, scholars have documented the multiple benefits of using children's literature in classrooms (Fuhler, 1990; Galda & Cullinan, 2003; Galda, Ash & Cullinan, 2000; Hade, 1999; Meek, 1988; Sipe, 1997). They conclude that literature not only assists children to learn to read but also helps them develop an appreciation for reading as a pleasurable aesthetic experience. Literature entertains, stretches imagination, elicits a wealth of emotions, and develops compassion. It generates questions and new knowledge, affords vicarious experiences of other worlds, and provides encounters with different beliefs and values.

Nodelman (1996) writes that good literature not only educates but also offers "access to a vast spectrum of ways of being human" (p. 129).

In Canada, children's literature has a recent history. Although the Canadian Library Association was established in 1946, the "real upsurge in publishing for Canadian children came in the wake of the nationalism that developed as a result of the Centennial celebrations in 1967" (Jones & Stott, 2000, p. viii). The publication of *The Republic of Childhood: A Guide to Canadian Children's Literature* (Egoff, 1967) marked a turning point in the acceptance and promotion of Canadian children's books. Two other important events contributed to the growth of children's literature in 1967: the debut of *In Review*, "the first journal dedicated to reviewing Canadian children's books and to providing profiles of their authors" (Jones & Stott, 2000, p. viii), and the founding of Tundra Books in Montreal, the first small publishing company "devoted exclusively to producing Canadian children's books as works of art" (p. ix). The Canadian Library Association established the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award in 1971 for the best-illustrated children's book published in Canada by an illustrator who is a Canadian citizen or resident. Other major events that contributed to the growth and recognition of Canadian children's literature included the founding of *Canadian Children's Literature* in 1975, the first academic journal devoted to the subject, the founding of the Canadian Children's Book Centre in 1976 and the establishment of the Canadian Book Publishing Development Program in 1976, a program that provided funding to assist with the publication of Canadian books. Since the late 1970s, Canadian writers, illustrators, and publishers have "produced an unparalleled abundance of high-quality literature of all kinds" for children (Jones & Stott, 2000, p. ix).¹

Several scholars have written about the significance of Canadian children and adolescents reading national literature (Bainbridge & Pantaleo, 1999; Dias, 1992; Egoff & Saltman, 1990; Pantaleo, 2000, 2002). Two recent studies demonstrate the increasing attention paid to Canadian literature. The Canadian Children's Illustrated Books Project² systematically examined "the historical context and development of Canadian children's illustrated books and the contemporary state of writing, illustrating, and publishing of children's illustrated books in Canada" (Canadian Children's Illustrated Book Project, 2003, Background section, ¶ 1). A second study, undertaken by The Writers' Trust of Canada, examined the use of Canadian literature in Canadian high schools (Baird, 2002). Baird found that teachers and students "are not adequately encouraged to read Canadian literature," and in the executive summary, she identified 15 "areas and methods where things need to be done to

assist the teaching of Canadian literature in Canadian high schools" (p. iv).

In my research I have investigated the use of children's literature in Canadian elementary schools to support teaching and learning. I distributed a survey to a sample of elementary teachers and teacher-librarians in Ontario to collect data about their knowledge and use of children's literature.³ In this article, I focus specifically on the survey data about teachers' and teacher-librarians' use of various genres of children's literature and their use of children's literature in specific curriculum areas.

METHOD

Survey Development and Distribution

In this research, I defined Canadian children's literature as work published in Canada, or as work that a Canadian has written, illustrated, or compiled. The study focused on English-language materials.

As reported in Pantaleo (2002), I constructed a survey and piloted it with several elementary teachers and graduate students. I used the oral and written feedback to revise the wording of some of the survey questions. I used a five-point Likert-type scale of Never (1), Seldom (2), Occasionally (3), Frequently (4), and Extensively (5) for most of the survey questions. Several questions were open-ended in nature, with space for respondents to write words, phrases, or sentences. In this survey, I also gathered demographic information about respondents: age, years of teaching experience, gender, and grades and subjects taught. When answering the survey questions, teachers and teacher-librarians were instructed to consider the grade level(s) where they worked during the previous school year. The survey was distributed during January and February and I wanted them to consider their practices over a period of a year. In the instructions to respondents, I explained that the survey questions were about trade books (i.e. children's literature), and not about textbooks used in the classroom. I also noted that a few questions would be irrelevant to teacher-librarians and asked them not to answer such questions.

At the time of the survey distribution, the 31 Ontario public district school boards employed about 49,900 elementary teachers, and the 29 Ontario Catholic district school boards employed approximately 23,500 elementary teachers. In each school board, approximately three-quarters of the teachers were female. Within each school board, school districts varied greatly both in their geographical size and in the number of teachers they employed (e.g., one participating school district had 155 elementary

schools while another school district had 10). I mailed a letter to each director or superintendent of an Ontario Public or Catholic school district to describe the project and request permission for the study. Seventeen public and 11 Catholic school districts agreed to take part in the study. The 28 participating districts varied in both size and geographical location within the province. I excluded French Immersion schools from the survey.

I sent a survey package to the principals of elementary and middle schools in participating school districts. The package contained a covering letter, three copies of the survey, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. In the covering letter, I noted that the school district had granted me permission to carry out the research, explained the purpose and rationale of the study, and requested that three teachers, including the teacher-librarian if there were one, complete the survey. Following sound ethical practice, I informed teachers and teacher-librarians that their participation in the project was voluntary; schools and school jurisdictions would not be identified when data were reported; and identification numbers on the surveys tracked returned surveys, but did not trace individuals.

Limitations

As I have discussed previously (Pantaleo, 2002), survey research has its limitations. One reality of survey research is unreturned surveys. The completion and return of all surveys may have resulted in alternative findings and interpretations of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). I also assumed that survey respondents were able to, and did, differentiate between Canadian children's literature and international literature when they answered the survey questions. Two further limitations in the use of a five-point scale are the assumptions that respondents will interpret the terms on the scale in a similar manner, and that the options are not equally apart on a Likert scale, unlike a numeric linear scale. Further, when reporting the findings, I collapsed some of the respondents' responses.

Self-report data provide a single means of gathering information about respondents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Classroom observations and interviews with an interested group of random respondents would have provided data to corroborate, extend, or challenge the survey findings. However, "there is some indication that field studies and mail surveys provide comparable information" (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon & Duffy-Hester, 1998 p. 645). For example, researchers found congruence between interview and survey data on several items that explored teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and instructional practices associated with the use of children's literature (Lehman, Freeman & Allen, 1994). Baumann et al. (1998)

noted that findings from survey research of elementary teachers' beliefs and practices about reading instruction "have corroborated results from observational studies" (p. 645) (Barr & Sadow, 1989; Sosniak & Stodolsky, 1993). Notwithstanding the above results, observational and interview data would provide further information about teachers' and teacher-librarians' knowledge and use of children's literature.

Values and expectations as well as external obligations, conventions, and pressures from other sources (Warwick & Lininger, 1975, p. 37) often influence the answers of survey respondents. Therefore, a second limitation associated with survey research is the risk of response biases such as deception or courtesy (Warwick & Lininger, 1975). Respondents may provide the answers they think the researcher wants to hear and not give their true opinions. Social desirability, another possible response bias, is described as the tendency to answer "questions in a way that conforms to dominant belief patterns among groups to which the respondent feels some identification or allegiance" (Dillman, 1978, p. 62). However, this limitation may not be a significant problem. As Baumann et al. (1998) write: "research has documented that mail surveys are much less prone to social desirability bias than are face-to-face or telephone surveys" (p. 646) (e.g., Hochstim, 1967; Wiseman, 1972). Dillman (1978) points out that surveys may have greater trustworthiness than interviews: "face-to-face interviews have the highest probability for producing socially desirable answers, the telephone survey next, and the mail survey least" (p. 63). In my study, the large number of respondents and the methodological procedures to ensure respondents' anonymity minimized the risk of response bias.

Respondents

Most respondents were women (85.63%). With respect to age, 32.20% of respondents were 50 years or over, 36.25% were 40-49 years, and 30.54% were 39 years and younger. In teaching experience, 37.19% of the respondents had 21-40 years, 32.21% had 11-20 years, and 30.59% had 1-10 years.

The population of participating schools ranged from 25 to 950 students. The three elementary divisions⁴ were not equally represented in the survey data: 43.7% of respondents taught primary-level children (Junior Kindergarten to grade 3), 33.7% taught junior-level students (grades 4-6), and 16.7% taught intermediate-level students (grades 7-8). Many teachers reported that they taught combined grades. Few special education teachers (5.9%) completed the survey. Both the special education teachers and the

teacher-librarians (approximately 20% of the total number of respondents) also reported teaching several grade levels. Most teacher-librarians had classroom teaching responsibilities (only 14.3% of respondents reported that the teacher-librarian in their school worked 4.1 to 5 days per week in the library).

Curriculum regulations in Ontario direct teachers to use literature in both language and all other areas of the curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1997, p. 27). The section on "Reading Materials" in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language*, the mandated Language curriculum at the time of the study, provides the following description:

The reading program should include a variety of materials, both fiction and non-fiction. Students should read both classic and contemporary literature of a high standard, including works produced by Canadians. . . . They should read an increasing variety of forms of both fiction and non-fiction (e.g., picture books, novels; poetry; myths, fables, folk tales; textbooks and books on science, history, mathematics, geography and other disciplines; biography, autobiography, memoirs, journals; encyclopedias; graphs, charts, diagrams, instructions, manuals; newspapers, editorials, articles; essays, reports, plays; scripts for television or radio). (p. 28)

In summary, curriculum regulations encourage teachers to use various genres of literature in all areas of the curriculum and to make Canadian literature a part of their reading program.

Data Analysis

Of the 3,999 surveys distributed to schools, respondents returned 1,027, providing a return rate of 25.7%. I eliminated 17 surveys because respondents either answered a small number of survey questions or were librarian-technicians, leaving 1,010 surveys in the study. I used a statistical analysis program, SPSS 10, to enter and analyze most of the data, and calculated means, medians, and frequency counts. In this article, I have reported percentages derived from frequency counts. For some of the open-ended survey questions, such as those that asked for a listing of favourite authors and books, I tallied respondents' answers. For the other open-ended questions, I searched for patterns and common issues in respondents' written answers.

FINDINGS

In reporting the findings, I have described the use of children's literature in general and Canadian children's literature in particular by a sample of

teachers and teacher-librarians in Ontario, using frequency counts and percentages primarily. In the first section, I have synthesized the survey data of teachers' and teacher-librarians' use of various genres of children's literature, and in the second, I have provided a description of their use of children's literature in specific subject areas.

The Use of Genres. In Table 1, I have arrayed respondents' answers to the survey questions on their use of different genres of literature. One question asked teachers and teacher-librarians to mark the descriptor (i.e. Never, Seldom, Occasionally, Frequently, or Extensively) to best describe their use in the previous year of each of the following genres: non-fiction or informational books, realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, poetry, and traditional literature. A second question inquired about respondents'

TABLE 1
Frequency Use of Genres of Literature

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently	Extensively	n/1010
Non-fiction or Informational Books						
General	0.5%	2.9%	22.8%	48.2%	25.6%	1002
Canadian	4.0%	12.9%	37.5%	33.9%	11.7%	917
Realistic Fiction (i.e. stories of everyday life — including mysteries)						
General	1.0%	5.1%	29.3%	52.3%	12.3%	1003
Canadian	6.6%	15.9%	42.6%	27.6%	7.3%	929
Fantasy (i.e. animal fantasy, time-slip fantasy, quest stories, personified toys and objects, science fiction and science fantasy)						
General	2.0%	12.6%	40.0%	35.7%	10.8%	999
Canadian	14.4%	25.2%	34.8%	20.0%	5.6%	914
Poetry						
General	9.0%	12.6%	40.0%	35.7%	10.8%	1014
Canadian	4.9%	18.6%	43.5%	26.4%	6.7%	925
Traditional Literature (i.e. myths, folktales, legends)						
General	1.1%	10.8%	42.0%	37.7%	8.5%	1003
Canadian	12.4%	29.8%	37.5%	17.6%	2.8%	921
Historical Fiction						
General	9.4%	28.9%	43.6%	16.0%	2.0%	997
Canadian	17.9%	26.3%	33.4%	17.7%	4.7%	912

use of each genre, but of Canadian literature. A third survey question asked about their use of different types of non-fiction or informational books, and a fourth question, about their use of different kinds of traditional literature.

Non-fiction. Approximately three-quarters (73.8%) of the teachers and teacher-librarians described their use of non-fiction in their teaching as either frequent or extensive (see Table 1). When answering the question about their use of types of non-fiction, fewer respondents marked these two descriptors to describe their use of each type of informational book (see Table 2).

Although respondents indicated using Canadian non-fiction or informational literature to a lesser extent (45.6% marked Frequently or Extensively) than non-fiction in general (see Table 1), the percentage for the use of Canadian non-fiction was higher than for the use of different types of non-fiction (see Table 2), with the exception of informational picture books. Overall, data analysis revealed very limited use of survey books, photo documentaries, and how-to books. When I examined grade-level data, I found that respondents used both general non-fiction and Canadian informational books to a similar extent across all grade levels.

Realistic Fiction. As shown in Table 1, approximately two-thirds of the teachers and teacher-librarians marked the responses of Frequently and Extensively (64.6%) to describe their use of realistic fiction in their classrooms or libraries. Approximately one-third of the respondents (34.9%) marked Frequently or Extensively to describe their use of Canadian realistic fiction. Their use of realistic fiction in general and Canadian realistic fiction in particular was consistent across all grade levels.

Fantasy. For the genre of fantasy, nearly one-half of the teachers and teacher-librarians (45.6%) marked either Frequently or Extensively. They used Canadian fantasy to a much lesser extent than general fantasy literature across all grade levels; one-quarter of the respondents marked either Frequently or Extensively (25.6%) to describe their use of Canadian fantasy literature. Further, responses revealed that teachers in primary grades used fantasy literature, including Canadian fantasy literature, more frequently than did teachers in junior and intermediate grades.

Poetry. Approximately one-half of the respondents (46.5%) indicated frequent or extensive use of poetry in their teaching. In their use of Canadian poetry, one-third of the teachers and teacher-librarians (33.1%) marked Frequently or Extensively. Responses suggested that respondents used poetry to a similar extent across all grade levels.

Traditional Literature Nearly one-half of the teachers and teacher-librarians (46.2%) reported frequent or extensive use of traditional literature (see

TABLE 2
Frequency Use of Types of Non-fiction or Informational Literature

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently	Extensively	n/1010
Informational Picture Books (i.e. factual information presented in a picture book format)	5.7%	10.2%	22.7%	38.1%	23.3%	992
Experiment and Activity Books	5.7%	17.9%	39.1%	29.2%	8.1%	993
Narrative Non-fiction (i.e. books that present a blend of fact and fiction with information presented in a narrative style)	4.9%	17.0%	44.1%	28.7%	5.3%	986
Question and Answer Books	12.3%	29.6%	36.5%	17.8%	3.7%	989
Biography	13.0%	28.0%	43.2%	13.7%	2.2%	987
How-to Books	14.4%	35.0%	36.8%	11.8%	2.0%	992
Field Guides and Identification Books	23.9%	32.2%	31.3%	10.0%	2.5%	987
Photodocumentaries	33.7%	35.7%	22.5%	7.2%	.9%	964
Survey Books	44.6%	37.4%	15.0%	25.0%	5.0%	967

Table 1). However, as Table 3 indicates, fewer respondents marked either Frequently or Extensively when they described their use of various types of traditional literature in their teaching. Table 1 shows that when respondents described their use of Canadian traditional literature, one-fifth of them (20.4%) marked Frequently or Extensively, a substantially lower percentage when compared to the use of traditional literature in general. Primary teachers used folk tales to a much greater extent than did teachers in junior and intermediate grades. Mother Goose rhymes were used Frequently or Extensively by approximately 40% of grades K-1 respondents,

TABLE 3
Frequency Use of Types of Traditional Literature

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently	Extensively	n/1010
Folk-tales	3.5%	14.6%	40.8%	32.3%	8.7%	999
Legends	3.3%	23.4%	49.4%	21.0%	2.8%	999
Fables	5.7%	28.1%	42.7%	20.1%	3.4%	990
Myths	8.1%	28.9%	44.8%	15.6%	2.5%	995
Mother Goose Rhymes	34.4%	27.9%	21.0%	10.7%	6.0%	992
Epics and Ballads	32.2%	38.7%	24.1%	4.5%	5.0%	993

20% of grade 2 respondents, and 10% of grades 3-8 respondents.

Historical Fiction. Compared to the number of respondents who indicated frequent or extensive use of each genre in general, and each genre of Canadian literature in particular, historical fiction had the lowest percentages (see Table 1). Respondents marked *Frequently* and *Extensively* to describe their use of historical fiction in general: fewer than one-fifth of the teachers and teacher-librarians (18.0%). About one-quarter of the respondents (22.4%) described their use of Canadian historical fiction as frequent or extensive. Historical fiction was the only genre where the frequency percentages for *Frequently* and *Extensively* were higher when respondents described their use of Canadian literature compared to their use of general literature. Overall, intermediate-grade teachers indicated using historical fiction (general and Canadian) to a greater extent than did either primary- or junior-grade teachers.

Children's Literature Across Subject Areas. One survey question asked respondents to describe their use of children's literature in language, math, social studies, science and technology, the arts, and health and physical education. These areas corresponded to the subject curriculum documents in Ontario at the time of this study. A second question asked respondents about their use of Canadian children's literature in these subject areas (see Table 4). Respondents indicated that they used children's literature to the greatest extent in language (90.2% of respondents marked *Frequently* or

Extensively). Approximately two-thirds of respondents (63.4%) indicated either frequent or extensive use of Canadian children's literature in language. Primary- and junior-grade teachers used children's literature to a slightly greater extent in language than did intermediate-grade teachers.

Teachers and teacher-librarians indicated that they used children's literature in social studies as the second most frequent curriculum area (see Table 4). Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (61.7%) indicated frequent or extensive use of children's literature in general in social studies, and over one-third of the respondents (39.8%) indicated that they used Canadian children's literature in social studies. Further data analysis revealed that primary teachers used children's literature in social studies to a greater extent than did teachers in junior or intermediate grades.

TABLE 4
Frequency Use of Children's Literature Across Subject Areas

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Frequently	Extensively	n/1010
Language						
General	.8%	2.0%	7.0%	21.5%	68.7%	954
Canadian	1.5%	5.3%	29.7%	40.0%	23.4%	879
Social Studies						
General	3.7%	7.2%	27.4%	41.5%	20.2%	908
Canadian	7.2%	16.0%	37.0%	28.1%	11.7%	921
Science and Technology						
General	10.3%	16.7%	31.3%	29.6%	12.0%	890
Canadian	19.6%	26.5%	34.0%	16.1%	3.9%	797
The Arts						
General	7.2%	18.0%	39.2%	26.5%	9.1%	911
Canadian	20.0%	30.1%	33.5%	12.5%	3.9%	818
Math						
General	15.4%	21.9%	37.6%	20.4%	4.8%	899
Canadian	29.9%	31.2%	26.4%	9.0%	3.6%	812
Health and Physical Education						
General	35.7%	31.5%	23.9%	7.0%	2.0%	858
Canadian	53.5%	26.5%	15.4%	3.3%	1.4%	767

Respondents used children's literature to a similar extent in science and technology and the arts. When describing their use of children's literature in these areas, approximately one-third of the respondents (41.6% and 35.6% respectively) indicated frequent or extensive usage. Approximately one-fifth of the teachers and teacher-librarians marked Frequently and Extensively to describe their use of Canadian children's literature in science and technology (20%) and in the arts (16.4%). Primary-grade teachers used literature (in general and Canadian) in these subject areas to a greater extent than did junior- and intermediate-grade teachers.

Approximately one-quarter of the respondents (25.2%) indicated frequent or extensive use of children's literature in math. When asked specifically about the use of Canadian children's literature in math, few teachers and teacher-librarians (12.6%) marked Frequently or Extensively. Although analysis of data showed that respondents used literature in math to a limited extent across all grade levels, they used it to a greater extent in primary grades than in junior and intermediate grades.

Teachers and teacher-librarians reported using literature to a very small extent in health and physical education. Very few respondents (9%) used children's literature Frequently or Extensively, and when asked specifically about their use of Canadian children's literature, even fewer respondents (4.7%) marked Frequently or Extensively.

CONCLUSION

The respondents in this study, who were overwhelmingly grades K–6 female teachers, used the genres of non-fiction, realistic fiction, and fantasy most frequently in their teaching. Teachers and teacher-librarians who completed the survey (73.8%) used the genre of non-fiction most frequently and extensively. This finding suggests a greater use of literature in the content areas (i.e. social studies, science, math) than was indicated by the respondents' answers to the survey questions about the use of literature in various subject areas (i.e. teachers generally use non-fiction more often in content area instruction than in language). Thus, the data indicate that respondents seemed to overstate the extent to which they used the genre of non-fiction in their teaching (see Table 1 and 3). Respondents' answers may have more accurately reflected their use of informational literature when they were asked to consider each type of non-fiction than when they were asked to describe their use of the genre in general. A similar explanation may account for the discrepancy between respondents' answers about their use of the genre of traditional literature (see Table 1) and their use of various types of traditional literature (see Table 3).

Frequently and Extensively were marked by fewer respondents when describing the extent of their use of genres of Canadian literature than when describing their use of genres of children's literature in general (see Table 1). For realistic fiction, fantasy, traditional literature, and non-fiction, approximately 30% more respondents marked Frequently or Extensively when describing the extent of their use of genres of literature in general than when describing the extent of their use of Canadian children's literature.

Overall, there were some grade-level effects with respect to respondents' use of specific genres of literature and with respect to their use of children's literature in subject areas. Data analysis revealed that intermediate-grade teachers used historical fiction to a greater extent than did primary- and junior-grade teachers; primary-grade teachers used traditional literature and fantasy to a greater extent than did junior or intermediate-grade teachers. Primary- and junior-level respondents used children's literature in language to a greater extent than did intermediate-grade level respondents. In addition, primary-grade teachers used children's literature to a greater extent in social studies, science and technology, the arts, and math than did junior- and intermediate-grade teachers.

With respect of the use of children's literature in specific subject areas, fewer respondents marked Frequently and Extensively when describing their use of Canadian literature than when describing their use of children's literature in general (see Table 4). Although teachers and teacher-librarians used literature to the greatest extent in language and social studies, considerable differences existed in these subject areas between respondents' use of children's literature in general and respondents' use of Canadian children's literature. With respect to language and social studies, approximately one-quarter more of the respondents (27% and 22% respectively) checked Frequently or Extensively when describing the extent of their use of children's literature in general, than when describing their use of Canadian children's literature. Respondents used Canadian children's literature to a small extent in math, science and technology, and the arts.

I asked respondents to indicate whether or not they believed it was important to use Canadian literature in their teaching. Nearly all the teachers and teacher-librarians who answered this question (96.0%) replied affirmatively (96.8%). Approximately three-quarters of the respondents (72.2%) wrote comments in the space provided for this survey question. Analysis of the written comments revealed the following reasons for using Canadian literature: Canadian literature encourages and promotes cultural awareness; Canadian children can relate to the content of Canadian literature because the books reflect Canadian settings, language, and

geography; the use of Canadian literature promotes and supports Canadian authors, illustrators, and literature; Canadian literature promotes awareness of, and pride in, Canadian identity; Canadian authors and illustrators provide role models for students; the content of Canadian literature is relevant to the curriculum; Canadian literature is quality literature; and Canadian literature counters American influences.

DISCUSSION

Although nearly all respondents indicated that they believed it important to use Canadian literature in their teaching and provided a variety of reasons to support their opinions, data from the survey questions presented in this article and elsewhere (Pantaleo, 2002) indicate minimal use of Canadian literature by many teachers and teacher-librarians. A combination of reasons may account for the latter findings. American children's literature, both the number of books published and the number of books in schools, is greater than Canadian children's literature. The depth of teachers' and teacher-librarians' knowledge of Canadian literature and the fit of Canadian literature with curriculum demands may be other reasons to explain the findings for the limited use of Canadian literature. Further, some individuals may be unwilling to devote the time required to seek out Canadian literature. The reduction in the number of teacher-librarian positions in Ontario may also have influenced the availability and use of children's literature in schools. Among their many roles, teacher-librarians order books for a school's library, consult with teachers about available resources, and promote books to both teachers and students.

Although several reasons explain the data reported in this article, the findings are disconcerting in several ways. Substantial differences occurred between respondents' reported use of genres of Canadian literature and genres of literature in general. When the descriptors of *Never* and *Seldom* were combined, respondents described their use of the various genres of Canadian children's literature as follows: 16.9% for non-fiction, 22.5% for realistic fiction, 39.6% for fantasy, 23.5% for poetry, 42.2% for traditional literature, and 44.2% for historical fiction. When the descriptors of *Never* and *Seldom* were combined, respondents described their use of Canadian children's literature in various subject areas as follows: 6.8% for language, 23.2% for social studies, 46.1% for science and technology, 50.1% for the arts, 61.1% for math, and 80.0% for physical education and health. Some inconsistency occurred between respondents' beliefs about the importance of using national literature and their actual use of Canadian children's literature in their teaching.

The Ontario language curriculum requires teachers to use various genres of literature in all areas of the curriculum and to make Canadian literature a part of the reading program (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1997, pp. 27–28). To meet the ministry's expectation, respondents will need to increase their use of genres of literature (general and Canadian) in their teaching. The findings from the study also indicate that respondents, especially those working with junior- and intermediate-level students, need to increase the use of literature in their teaching to more successfully meet the language curriculum expectation that states students need to read a "wide range of materials in all areas of the curriculum" (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1997, p. 27). In support of the ministry's guidelines, substantial research has documented the multiple benefits associated with using literature in both language and content area subjects (Allington, Guice, Michelson, Baker & Li, 1996; Freeman & Person, 1998; Galda, Ash & Cullinan, 2000; Morrow & Gambrell, 2000; Smith & Bowers, 1989).

Pantaleo's (2002) survey data about teachers' and teacher-librarians' selection of children's literature in general and Canadian children's literature in particular revealed the existence of a canon of literature. The list of authors whose work the teachers and teacher-librarians enjoyed and the list of authors whose work their students enjoyed (according to respondents) were very similar. In addition, with respect to Canadian authors, only individuals from Ontario appeared on the two lists. Respondents' answers also indicated a lack of familiarity with Canadian children's literature illustrators; 10 illustrators accounted for approximately 80% of the total number of illustrators that teachers and teacher-librarians listed.

The survey findings reported in this article on elementary teachers' and teacher-librarians' use of various genres of children's literature, and their use of children's literature in specific curriculum areas, as well as other survey data gathered about respondents' knowledge and use of Canadian literature (see Pantaleo, 2002), resonate with the conclusions and recommendations included in Baird's (2002) report on the use of Canadian literature in Canadian high schools. The conclusions and implications from my survey support the following points articulated by Baird:

- Teachers need more and better access to resource material about Canadian literature.
- There is significant competition from American literature.
- Funding is a problem — there is not enough money for books, for resources, for writers-in-schools programs, or for professional

development.

- Decline in librarians has affected access and depleted collections in school libraries.
- There are not enough professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Teachers need more support from all sectors including government agencies. (pp. iv-vi)

Although the work reported in this article extends the small body of research that has examined the use of Canadian literature in Canadian elementary schools, the survey findings characterize the use of children's literature in general, and Canadian children's literature in particular of a sample of teachers and teacher-librarians in Ontario and should not be considered to be representative of the population of elementary teachers and teacher-librarians in Ontario or other provinces. Obviously the investigation could be extended by distributing the survey to teachers and teacher-librarians in private schools in Ontario, and in public and private schools in other provinces and territories. Further, qualitative studies of teachers' and teacher-librarians' experiences with children's literature would provide another perspective on this issue. As well, future research could investigate the use of French Canadian and Aboriginal children's literature in elementary and middle schools.

The Importance of National Literature

The use of national literature to support teaching and learning in schools is a subject of significance for educators in countries throughout the world. Literature is a way to socialize children to have them understand and appreciate their own culture and the culture of others. As Curtis and Moir (1982) write, from stories

we learn our connectedness and continuity as family members, as a society, as a culture; our roles and responsibilities, our expectations, and the expectations of others. It is from stories we learn our mores and our values as a group and as a member of that group. (p. 1)

Literature can be a powerful way to transmit national culture, and hence national identity. "The children's literature of a nation is a microcosm of that country's literary and socio-cultural values, beliefs, themes, and images, including those of geography, history, and identity" (Canadian Children's Illustrated Books, 2003, Background Section, ¶ 2). Although writing about Canada and Canadian literature, the following comments

by Diakiw (1997) are applicable to all countries. He explains that

children grow up hearing and learning the stories that define their culture . . . and these shared stories lie at the heart of a culture's identity. . . . Literature, arts and crafts, music, dance, film, and poetry blend together over time to crystallize an image that says, "This is who we are." (p. 37)

Diakiw believes that there are "powerful commonplaces in our culture and identity — shared values that most Canadians can identify with" (p. 37), that "story and literature are important ways to reveal these commonplaces" (p. 36), and that a connection exists between Canadian literature and Canadian cultural identity.

Other researchers have written about the importance of children reading literature that reflects their culture. Sims (1983), like many others, believes that literature passes on social and cultural values to readers. She completed a study that examined contemporary realistic fiction about people of colour. Sims argued that culturally relevant stories, where students see themselves in texts, can assist their academic achievement. Eisemon, Martin, and Maundi (1986) also explored the use of culturally relevant stories with African students. These researchers suggested that African folktales, which reflect African culture, facilitate African students' learning because they more readily identify with the characters, plot, and setting in such stories. Schon and Greathouse (1990) examined the role of developmentally appropriate books written in Spanish for Spanish speaking children. They wrote that the

first goal in helping children appreciate diversity is to help facilitate positive gender, racial, cultural and class identity in the children themselves. Books in Spanish can help young children understand and appreciate themselves and the beauty and variety of Hispanic culture and language. (p. 311)

The above discussion underscores the need for the solicited selection and inclusion of national literature that reflects a country's diversity. Baird's (2002) study on Canadian literature in high schools found that knowledge and access issues permeate all levels (individual, local, regional, provincial, and national). At the university level, preservice teacher-education programs need to provide information about the many resources available for learning about and selecting Canadian children's literature to ensure its important inclusion in classrooms. There are numerous Canadian publications, organizations, and websites devoted to Canadian children's literature (see Pantaleo, 2002).

The influence of stories cannot be overstated; literature can influence students' beliefs, values, and attitudes (Wham, Barnhardt & Cook, 1996). Culturally relevant stories should be an integral part of every Canadian classroom. Reading national literature will assist Canadian children in understanding and appreciating their individuality, their role in the Canadian collective, as well as a sense of the universal emotions and themes in individual human stories. Teachers and teacher-librarians need to be knowledgeable about Canadian literature, authors, and illustrators to use children's literature effectively in their classrooms.

NOTES

- 1 For a chronological review of the development of Canadian children's literature see "The Coming of Age of Children's Literature in Canada: A Chronology" at <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/literature/10/t10-204-e.html>, a link on the website of The National Library of Canada.
- 2 See <http://www.slais.ubc.ca/saltman/ccib/Welcme.html>, the website of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books Project. The project's website provides information about the study, the research team, and related resources. According to the researchers, their project will provide new critical understanding of Canadian identity as presented in picturebooks to children; explore the contribution of Canadian picturebooks to children's intellectual and imaginative development; assess the literary and visual contributions of Canadian authors and illustrators; and analyze the issues involved in the editing, design, publishing, and marketing of Canadian picturebooks. (Canadian Children's Illustrated Book Project, 2003 Background section, ¶ 3)
- 3 In this article, I report on only a few questions from the "Children's Literature Survey" that I distributed to teachers and teacher-librarians in Ontario. See Pantaleo (2002) for a discussion of other survey findings.
- 4 In Ontario the three elementary divisions are Primary (grades JK-3), Junior (grades 4-6), and Intermediate (grades 7 and 8).

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