

Book Review

Reading Diversity through Canadian Picture Books: Preservice Teachers Explore Issues of Identity, Ideology, and Pedagogy

Ingrid Johnston and Joyce Bainbridge (Editors)
Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013

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Picture books are a popular instructional resource, and few individuals would challenge their common recognition as useful classroom tools. Ingrid Johnston and Joyce Bainbridge, however, aim to replace the prevailing notion that illustrated volumes are best suited for young learners with a broader appreciation for such books' instructional use and value. In support of their goal, a multi-site national research study was deployed to investigate connections between picture books and "preservice teachers' sense of national identity and their perceptions of the diverse needs of Canadian students" (p. 3). Their edited book is a collection of chapters that shed insight on teacher candidates' perceptions of topics that range from historical wrongs, such as how colonization harmed Indigenous communities, to if and how social justice orientations become actionable in classroom instruction, such as by engaging in reflective discussions with students.

Reading Diversity through Canadian Picture Books: Preservice Teachers Explore Issues of Identity, Ideology, and Pedagogy opens with an introduction that provides an overview of the overarching purpose, procedures, theoretical framework, and objectives for the project. At first glance, the book appears to provide additional backing for the frequently reported contention that many teachers do not readily or critically engage diversity themes in classroom instruction. A more thoughtful consideration of the text, however, highlights a worthy journey that guides readers through trends that are too often underexplored in teacher education research.

Chapter 1 by Joyce Bainbridge and Beverley Brenna centered on participants' understandings of critical literacy and their sense of social responsibility as teacher candidates and novice educators. Based on data that they collected at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Canada, Bainbridge and Brenna concluded that the teacher candidates with whom they worked generally favoured social justice principles. Yet, subsequent extensions to the classroom appeared to be limited as participants expressed reservations that were linked to their respective teaching contexts. Teacher candidates who planned to teach in elementary schools voiced concerns about broaching controversial subjects while individuals with secondary placements seemed reluctant to accept picture books as age-appropriate materials.

Ingrid Johnston and Farha Shariff further explored the study participants' beliefs about classroom practice in Chapter 2. The authors enlarged the discourse on teacher perceptions by "considering how ... texts challenged participants' sense of self and taken-for-granted views

about Canadian multiculturalism” (p. 41). One of the chapter’s chief contributions is an analysis of how participants’ personal narratives shaped dominant interpretations of multiculturalism and receptivity to various storylines. For example, first- and second-generation Canadians were “open” to considering how children’s books could be used to create inclusive classrooms, such as by focusing on historically marginalized groups, including Chinese immigrants and Japanese Canadians who were placed in internment camps during World War II. Similar themes are probed in Chapter 3, by Lynne Wiltse, which builds understanding of how bigotry affected Chinese Canadians during construction of the nation’s railways, Ukrainian immigrants during World War I, and Aboriginal peoples during the residential schooling program. Collectively, the chapters provide a blueprint for how picture books can help students understand the historical backdrop to Canada’s present-day multicultural society.

Authored by Angela Ward, Chapter 4 provided one of the most extensive treatments of Aboriginal education. Educators are likely to be intrigued by the comparative findings that emerged from data collected from two sets of secondary school teacher candidates, in addition to individuals from pre-service elementary education, First Nations, and urban Aboriginal programs. Having transpired in an area that serves a large number of First Nation youths, the chapter offers insight into how issues, such as how Canadian identity is imagined, may be tackled in classroom settings, as well as some of the barriers that impede teachers’ decisions to engage critical explorations.

Chapters 5 and 6 jointly situated readers in the realm of lesson planning. Both narratives offer helpful outlines for how teacher candidates advanced their students’ appreciation for diverse cultures while simultaneously expanding their content knowledge using picture books. The Chapter 5 authors, Mary Clare Courtland and Ismel González, considered how “the power of modelling and experiential learning” (p. 111) strengthens teacher candidates’ capacity for reflection while Teresa Strong-Wilson and Heather Phipps’ latter chapter included an especially useful synopsis of books that are penned by Indigenous writers. The edited book includes two final chapters by Anne Burke and Roberta Hammett that focused on visual literacy and the teaching process; the entries jointly point to avenues for social transformation through increased cultural awareness.

Reading Diversity through Canadian Picture Books closed with an afterword in which the editors reflect on the project at large and outcomes that were documented across various research sites. Johnston and Bainbridge concluded that picture books spur valuable growth among teacher candidates such as by drawing attention to difficult historical realities and unearthing areas for continued growth such as the need to amplify visions of “who” is Canadian. Overall, *Reading Diversity through Canadian Picture Books* is worthwhile to read, and the editors have done a fine job of crafting a resource that balances theory with examples of classroom application. Practitioners will benefit from the pedagogical suggestions that are included while administrators and teacher educators will acquire insight into teacher candidates’ orientations toward diversity. The book’s attention to Indigenous peoples, in particular, helps to distinguish the volume from other publications that tend to overlook Aboriginal populations. Individuals who work with teacher education programs will be challenged to provide practical advice for handling candidates’ well-placed apprehensions about provocative topics. Given the project’s broad scope and ambitious goals, the editors and contributors should be commended for producing a work that is easy to read and practical.

Including more detailed information about applicable methods would enhance the piece for researchers who are interested in the study’s ideas. Although summaries for the national and

site-specific studies are provided, scholars may wish to have more information about processes such as how picture books were selected, interview protocols were developed, and data were analyzed. Furthermore, clarifying the steps that were taken to reach various conclusions may help to illuminate alternative explanations that are informative for the field.

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