

# Patterns and Themes in Canadian Picture Books Published in 2017: A Content Analysis of 132 Titles Using Dresang's Lens of Radical Change

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*This article presents the results from an examination of 132 picture books published in Canada in 2017 where at least one author or illustrator was living in Canada at the time of publication. The patterns and themes noted from this study have the potential to guide educators and families, as well as authors, illustrators and publishers. The research team utilized Dresang's (1999) notion of Radical Change to underpin the study and interpreted the data collected using Berg's (2009) framework for content analysis. Of particular note in the current sample were the 13 books created by Indigenous authors and/or illustrators which is indicative of a levelling out of these titles over time, as well as an overall low total within the entire sample. Problematic gaps appeared in relation to particular aspects of diversity, specifically in presentations of ability/disability, and minority sexual orientations of adult characters. These findings encourage future research geared towards changes in the field of Canadian children's literature in education as well as further research into reader response.*

*Cet article présente les résultats d'un examen de 132 livres d'images publiés au Canada en 2017 dont au moins un des auteurs ou des illustrateurs vivait au Canada au moment de la publication. Les tendances et les thèmes que soulignent cette étude peuvent servir de guide aux enseignants et aux familles, ainsi qu'aux auteurs, aux illustrateurs et aux éditeurs. La recherche repose sur la notion de changement radical de Dresang (1999) et l'interprétation des données recueillies s'est effectuée avec le cadre pour l'analyse du contenu de Berg (2009). Il convient de souligner qu'il y avait dans notre échantillon les 13 livres créés par des auteurs ou illustrateurs autochtones, ce qui indique une stabilisation de ces titres au fil du temps ainsi qu'un total peu élevé globalement. Des lacunes problématiques sont apparues relativement à des aspects particuliers de la diversité, notamment quant aux présentations de la capacité/l'incapacité et aux orientations sexuelles minoritaires des personnages adultes. Ces résultats incitent à la réalisation d'autres études à l'avenir portant sur les changements dans le domaine de la littérature canadienne pour enfants et à davantage d'autre recherche sur la réaction des lecteurs.*

At a time when the number of books for young people appear to be increasing, it is important to reflect on data about children's literature that will guide us into further understandings of this rich resource in light of its ability to reach various audiences for educational and other purposes.

In addition to educational contexts, Canadian children's literature is also significant in communities where public spaces such as libraries, centres and clinics offer materials for lending or other temporary use and many permanent and transient home-collections support children's reading interests, language development, and growing understandings of self and other. However, what entails the composition of the titles we are sharing with young people? What is Canada's contribution to an actualization of Radical Change—Dresang's (1999) notion that books for youth are evolving, thanks to the digital age, in three directions: changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries? This article is based on research conducted to explore Canadian picture books published in Canada by professional publishing houses and created by Canadian authors and/or illustrators—namely, creators living in Canada at the time of publication, according to publishers' websites and professional book reviews.

This particular discussion attends to aspects of the study set in relation to categories from the original notion of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999). A second discussion emerges in a subsequent paper to explore in detail aspects of the study set that connect to ethnic and cultural diversity themes (Tavares, Weber, & Brenna, 2019) including the concept of postethnicity (Johnston & Mangat, 2003).

Our study set was located through a variety of means and intended as a comprehensive sample of all of the Canadian picture books published in 2017. The research team for this article consisted of one faculty member, one undergraduate research assistant, and one graduate research assistant. We used a mixed methods approach, looking qualitatively at the contents of the books as well as quantitatively at counts of particular elements such as author and illustrator gender. Our data set contained 132 titles that met specific criteria including location of the author or illustrator within Canada, and we collected data using an instrument developed from previous studies of children's literature (Brenna, 2010; Brenna, Sun, & Liu, 2017). In the following discussion, for simplicity, we reference particular picture books by title and author's last name, while recognizing that illustrators, in many cases, are equal partners in terms of the final product and thus we have included illustrators' names within our adapted bibliography format.

## **Literature Review**

### **Previous Research on Children's Literature Content and Production**

Early studies in children's literature, such as Eakin's (1955) work with 4,381 books, identified trends that connect changes in content with social patterns. Previous research has also explored trends in sales and production (Eakin, 1955; Epstein, 2001) and market affect along with human diversity and representation (Short, 2018). Dresang's (1999; Dresang & Kotrla, 2009) leading research examining possible effects of the digital world on change in children's literature offers substantial theory around changing forms and formats, the introduction of new perspectives, and shifting boundaries—three categories that we have utilized as lenses for data collection in this study. From Dresang's (1999) perspective of Radical Change, children's books are increasingly using new forms including blended genres, as well as formats that present unique time-related patterns such as non-sequential storylines. Previously unheard voices, such as characters with exceptionalities, are broadening the perspectives offered in books for youth, and boundaries related to topics that involve serious content or otherwise mature themes are gaining acceptance. Dresang's (1999) original notion of Radical Change anticipates a time when her particular categories—forms and formats, perspectives, and boundaries—will shift in favor of other, newer

categories, and Dresang herself constantly reconsiders her initial categorization (Dresang & Kotrla, 2009).

Dresang's (1999) conceptualization of Radical Change reflects the connectivity, interactivity and access that appear in the world around us, including through technology. In particular, internet use and conventions have influenced children's literature in myriad ways. As Dresang and McClelland (1999) state, "The nature and character of today's society nurture and encourage radical-change books in a way that the past has never done" (p. 160). The application of Dresang's work in the current study involves the way we examine books for characteristics which might otherwise go unnoticed, as well as the way readers might accommodate radical-change books into new understandings of what literature is and might someday be.

Dresang's work is extended by multiple studies that focus on the evolution of children's literature. For example, Mickenberg and Nel's (2011) research locates texts that seem to cast aside many traditional assumptions about appropriate children's content. Nalkara (2018) and Nikolajeva (2016) further explore the idea of radical change through qualitative content/document analysis using a limited sample of picture books, examining postmodernism in the former and dialogism with past literature in the latter. Mikkelsen's (2000) conclusions are that in the last three decades, picture books have "become increasingly experimental, with thematic complexities and sophisticated artistry that have entirely changed their look" (p. 31).

A number of recent studies have explored the particular content of contemporary picture books. To that end, one study focuses exclusively on examining multicultural perspectives within the Canadian content (Bainbridge & Wolodko, 2002), while others pay specific attention to topics such as the liminal spaces between text and pictures and its presentation of a Canadian identity (Johnston & Mangat, 2003) and gender explorations related to female protagonists and immigration experiences (Mallan, 2004). Other studies have focused on topics such as disability traits in Canadian picture book characters (Brenna, 2015; Emmerson, Fu, Lendsay, & Brenna, 2014). In addition, a comprehensive historical examination of picture books in Canada was conducted by Edwards and Saltman (2010). However, the majority of North American research on the content of children's literature has focused on American children's books, with very little attention to Canadian titles.

One small study examining perspectives of Canadian material abroad does include a specific analysis of Canadian picture books appearing in Germany (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2009), broadening perspectives on Canadian content, and newer projects have connected North American multicultural picture books with Asian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms (Shin & Brenna, 2018). Additionally, Brenna and colleagues (2017) completed similar research to the study at hand, focused on a comprehensive set of Canadian picture books published in 2005 and 2015 by Canadian authors and/or illustrators, which will provide a comparative set of data.

### **Previous Research on Classroom Studies Using Children's Literature**

Beyond research on children's picture books as the sole focus, there is also research around the use of children's picture books within classroom settings. Pantaleo's (2017; 2018) work in Canadian classrooms investigates how picture book discussions might translate into understandings of metalanguage associated with visual art and design as well as critical thinking skills. Pantaleo's (2004) earlier work using Dresang's (1999) Radical Change characteristics, identified that Grade One students demonstrated increased interaction and thus more involved reading with texts that communicated Radical Change elements such as changing forms/formats,

perspectives, and boundaries. Other studies related to the use of picture books in classrooms include Hadaway and Mundy's (1999) exploration of the impact of informational picture books among secondary English Language Arts learners, which shows the value of picture book use across the grades. Similarly, Burke and Peterson's (2007) research argues for picture books as a supportive medium across the curriculum with high school students. Early and Yeung (2009) extended an investigation into Grade 9 students' creation of picture books to investigate multiple literacy tasks supporting increased fluency with French language. It is quite possible that the use of picture books, in addition to their content, could become a component of future definitions of *radical*, adding to Dresang's (1999) initial notion of Radical Change and moving it forward. Brenna, Sun, and Liu (2017) refer to this in their consideration of a shifting audience for picture books, identifying titles that seem to be presented specifically for older readers ages 8 and up.

We note a division between studies on contemporary picture books and applications of these books in classroom practice. As further classroom-related studies are anticipated, it is important that specific Canadian picture books be identified in order to design explorations of Canadian materials with various age groups of readers. It is the intent of this study to identify patterns and themes in a comprehensive sample of Canadian picture books in order to support future studies utilizing this literature with children and other reading age-groups.

## Research Design

### Study Sample

A total of 132 picture books were identified for the final study set. The list was obtained by contacting seventy-six Canadian publishers by email and requesting titles of picture books published in the year 2017. In total 53 publishers replied with suggested titles for our study. Additionally, we considered other titles through examining awards' lists and book reviews, with particular attention to the online *CM: Canadian Review of Materials* magazine, and summaries from *The Canadian Children's Book News*. Excluded from the study were board books, counting books, alphabet books, or books with no visible creator on the cover or book jacket. Overall, the majority of the books included contained 32 pages, which is standard practice in the picture book industry (Sambuchino, 2016). For a complete list of titles included in the study, see Appendix A.

Every attempt was made to achieve a complete study sample of all books meeting our criteria. Thus, one of the limitations of this study is the possibility that individual books may have been missed. However, given that our discussion offers comparisons with previous studies using the same methodology (Brenna et al. 2017), we suggest that the general trends noted here can be considered valid.

### Methodology and Method

This research project was designed as a survey of the Canadian picture books published by professional Canadian publishing companies in 2017, with further restrictions that either author or illustrator (or both) were Canadian. We used content analysis based on Berg's (2009) framework to explore pre-identified aspects of text, such as genre and time-sequence targeted for exploration because of Dresang's (1999) original focus on Radical Change. In addition, we made note of emerging categories that arose from our reading, a process modelled after previous work (Brenna, 2010; Brenna et al. 2017) and reproduced here in Appendix B.

Due to the subjective nature and complexity of evaluating much of the picture book content, we acknowledge the shaping hand of the researcher through qualitative analysis while at the same time relying on quantitative, numerical data to present particular patterns and suggest possible trends over time in connection to past studies. For example, when determining the genre of several of the books, the blended result of genres such as realism and fantasy was a complex task. Each title was catalogued under what the research team qualified as its dominant genre, with detailed notes taken about where shifts occurred into secondary genres. Additionally, determining whether or not particular books could be called “picture books” was at times challenging due to the hybrid nature of some of the texts. We deliberated whether some of the books were actually graphic novels, chapter books, board books, or actual picture books according to the definition of a picture book as “those books in which images and ideas join to form a unique whole” (Kiefer, 2010, p. 156) with generally standard expectations of 32 pages as required by the North American publishing industry (Costello, 2018; Sambuchino, 2016). There were books in our preliminary group which were discarded as we attempted to remain true to our definition of what picture books are and are not.

The research team was composed of a Principal Investigator supported by one undergraduate and one graduate research assistant. A team-approach was required in order to tackle the large amount of reading and re-reading involved, with each book initially read once by one of the research assistants and then again by the Principal Investigator. All of the books chosen for the study were retained in a physical collection that allowed the team to have continual access throughout the study which became increasingly important in the analysis of patterns and trends as raw data could be checked and re-checked as required. Following the completion of the data collection charts on all of the books, the lead researcher compiled the data on large wall charts in order to visually note patterns and themes across all titles. Through this process, categories of interest emerged in addition to the three categories of Radical Change initially suggested as a framework for this study, and the discussion section of this article identifies key findings in this regard.

As with all qualitative research, we acknowledge the shaping hand of the researcher in our data collection and analysis, in that “the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). We also utilized the more arms-length quantitative lens in our numerical counts. Based on our goal to identify possible patterns, themes and potential trends to watch, we anticipate that the results of this study will assist future research even with the potential of error or diverse viewpoints related to specific perspectives. We suggest that our method of data collection, with each member of the study team using a detailed chart for data collection, provided consistency of observations and a reliable record of results while also recognizing that a margin of human error is possible in any study such as this. Our stance recognizes Greene’s (1995) differentiation of seeing big and seeing small, suggesting that the optic for seeing a large field from a distance is an appropriate lens for this paper, and encouraging future close-up work to focus on single patterns and themes. We offer our reading and analysis so that further study may take up where ours has finished, also recognizing that the landscape of Canadian children’s literature is ever-changing, and that one simple snapshot will never be enough to categorize the entire shifting field over time.

## Conceptual Framework

The original categories of Radical Change (Dresang, 1999) continue to offer an illuminative way to conceptualize the evolution of children's literature regarding new textual forms and formats, new perspectives, and shifting boundaries. Some of our data collection responded specifically to these categories as identified under the headings that follow here, spotlighting aspects of our set of picture books that seemed to have taken a step backwards as well as forwards under these headings. As we note, some of the patterns perceived in this set are problematic with respect to social justice ideals.

**Radical change in forms and formats.** Specific attention was provided to a current iteration of the picture book format as well as examinations of point of view, sequential vs non-sequential formats, types of text presentation ranging from paragraphs, sentences, phrases, and other formats, as well as conventions seen to enhance readability/comprehension. Genre was also considered under this category.

**Radical Change in new perspectives.** As we examined the content of these picture books for what we determined could be new perspectives, we specifically identified characters in terms of age, gender and ability/disability. Extending from the content of the books themselves, we looked at potential audience age as a possible new perspective relating to picture books in general, although at times audience age also signified shifting boundaries. We also wondered whether urban vs rural settings might appear in terms of any sort of pattern, and what kinds of themes were presented in these contemporary picture books. A subsequent focus on unheard voices within this category also offered much data, and is the source of a separate paper based on our comprehensive findings about the presence (and absence) of immigrant cultures in this set of books (Tavares et al., 2019).

**Radical Change in shifting boundaries.** Earlier studies (Brenna et al., 2017) prompted us to consider how the picture book form could be used in contemporary publishing to reach a variety of audiences including older readers. We wondered whether picture books that extend beyond the typical birth to age eight in terms of readership might be evidence of a trend. Other boundaries we explored related to the presence of parents in the content of the books in the study set: were moms and dads featured with equality, and were same-sex parents visible in any of the books?

## Findings and Discussion

This section delineates particular patterns noted in the set of picture books as well as key titles worth spotlighting as examples or exemplars. Although we are unable to mention all the books by name, we anticipate that readers will find the included titles useful for further study or classroom application.

### Forms and Formats

A scrutiny of language in the books resulted in findings that 55% of the books presented from a third-person "He/She" point of view, 21% from a first-person "I/We" viewpoint, and 6% from the second-person "You" perspective. There were also interesting patterns which appeared in terms of blended perspectives. For example, in Bolger's *See Fred Run*, there were situations where the characters directly addressed the book's narrator. This seems to parallel a technique in theatre

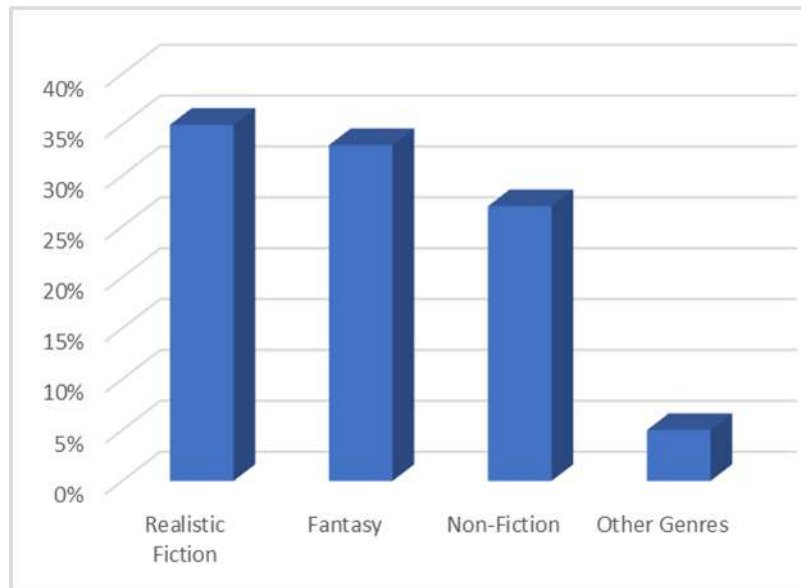


Figure 1 Patterns Related to Genre in the 2017 Picture Book Set

where characters *break the fourth wall*—essentially addressing the audience directly (Mangan, 2013). However, in *See Fred Run*, instead of addressing their audience the characters are addressing the narrator of their story, essentially acknowledging that it is a story and thus offering three levels: the level of the characters themselves; the level of the narrator talking about the characters; and, by inference, the level of us, an audience, observing them both. Additional blended perspectives included two books with both first and third person points of view, three books with combinations of first and second person points of view, and thirteen books (at almost 10% of the total) with both second and third person points of view.

In terms of sequential vs. non-sequential formats, only a few titles in the picture book set demonstrated non-sequential formats. Notable was Maclear’s striking conversation between two friends in *Yak and Dove*, which at first did not include a clear sequential line, but over time and through the course of three “chapter-like” installments, generated a story arc. Also notable was Keely’s *A Book of Bridges: Here to There and Me to You*, which unfolded as two types of non-fiction texts running parallel. One of these texts emerged in large, bold print, with simple phrases on each page that corresponded with the illustrations. The other text appeared in smaller, white text on a contrasting background and extended a related concept in more intermediate details.

As indicated in Figure 1, realistic fiction was the most common genre at almost 35%, closely followed by fantasy at 33% which included animal fantasy as just over half of the titles in this category. Non-fiction was the next most common at 27% which included narrative non-fiction as just under half of the non-fiction titles. The lowest totals were historical fiction (3 books), magic realism (2 books) and science fiction (1 book), which are included in the other genre category in Figure 1. Some of the books in this study set were not easy to categorize in terms of genre, and at times blended genres appeared as unique forms although we catalogued each title in a dominant genre and then illustrated secondary genres presented, if applicable. For example, Tekavec’s *Different? Same!* is an interesting blend of first and third person, with non-fiction labels and information presented through narrative non-fiction. Wilson’s *Liam Takes a Stand* is essentially realistic fiction but the illustrations add a touch of animal fantasy. Delaunoy’s *Water’s Children: Celebrating the Resource that Unites Us All* presents as informational material told in evocative

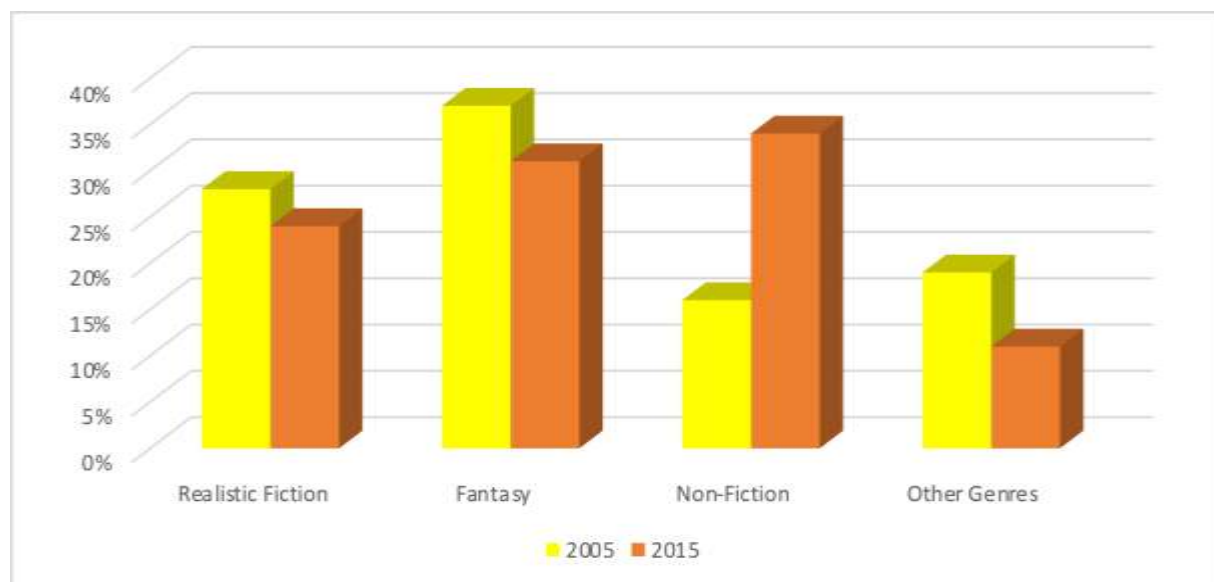


Figure 2 Patterns Related to Genre from a Previous Study (Brenna et al., 2017)

free verse from a first-person perspective. McLellan’s *The Christmas Wind* and Shaw’s *Piece by Piece* are poignant realistic fiction that also hearken back to the nativity story, in the former, and fairy tales, in the latter.

These findings in relation to genre compare to results from a previous study of picture books (Brenna et al., 2017). Fantasy and then realistic fiction appeared most prevalent in 2005, compared to realistic fiction and then fantasy in the current study, while non-fiction and then fantasy were most prevalent in 2015 (see Figure 2).

Stories and information were presented in a variety of forms within each genre, ranging from a more traditional presentation, through the use of paragraphs, sentences, phrases and single words, to formats reminiscent of graphic novels which use sidebars, speech bubbles, narrator boxes, environmental print, labels and captions, lists, and word pictures. Poetry in the form of free verse and rhyme was included. Various cues and conventions seemed designed to enhance meaning of words including the following, also reminiscent of the graphic novel form: type and style of font including bold print, capital letters vs lowercase, quotations marks and italics used for emphasis, highlighted onomatopoeia, and color use (directly to infer meaning, or through contrast/emphasis). Harbridge’s *When the Moon Comes* uses alternating black and white font to work with many of his night and day illustrations, a strong example of the use of colour to signify meaning. Collier’s picture book *A Horse Named Steve* is a striking example of what we would consider a “hybrid” picture book and graphic novel, appearing as a standard picture book in length and dimensions, but extending its narrative through many other features borrowed from graphic novels, such as speech bubbles. Although Costello (2018) states that “picture books are formatted very differently than graphic novels. They don’t have panels or speech bubbles” (p. 19), we observed that many of the books in this data set were altering this clear demarcation between the two forms.

Other types of hybrid forms involving combinations of picture book and novel or graphic novel forms include: Stelling’s *Ben and the Colonel*, which is shaped like a picture book but includes ten word-filled chapters; Richardson’s *Alphabet Thief*, which extends, through a small hardcover



chapter bookish package, stanzas of a rhyming poem and corresponding illustrations that read like a picture book; Knowles' *Once Upon a Jungle*, with two spectacular fold-out pages near the end; and Ellis's *Waiting for Sophie* which has four, sequential, illustrated chapters that also contain various graphic novel features.

Although many of the previously mentioned graphic novel elements can be seen to enhance readability and comprehension, we noted other features that could also support audience understanding including:

- repetition of sections of text;
- spacing between paragraphs to assist conceptualization of main ideas;
- footers containing further explanations;
- clear differentiation of questions and answers in Q & A formatted texts, such as Roderick's energetic *Bugs from Head to Tail*;
- the placement of illustrations directly beside difficult vocabulary; and
- features of non-fiction that support meaning, such as tables of contents, glossaries, various levels of headings in addition to titles, indexes, and varying spacing between words.

Some elements of readability and audience choice may fall under the Forms and Formats heading of Dresang's (1999) original conceptualization of Radical Change, but it is also possible that these topics go beyond this category and into evidence of new radical changes of a magnitude that deserves a new categorization scheme.

We also noted texts that included dual language to encourage linguistic transfer as well as cultural responsiveness, including Nicholson's *I Wait (nipêhon)*—a simple yet eloquent story written in Cree using both standard Roman orthography and syllabics as well as English. Many of the other works by Indigenous authors/illustrators also include examples of Canadian Indigenous languages, and sometimes, as with Nicholson's book, the Indigenous language not only appears first in the internal workings of the book, but on the cover itself.

Educational aspects we noted include sections throughout or at the end of various books to present additional information, related books and websites, as well as writing prompts which we see as another aspect of audience engagement. For example, Larsen's *The Man Who Loved Libraries*, and Renaud's *Mr. Crumb's Potato Predicament* conclude with a list of sources both online and in print. Some of the titles, such as Ruurs' *Birthdays Around the World*, include a heading directing additional resources to parents and teachers but most of the books appear to assume that any age of reader might be interested in follow-up activities and connections.

## **New Perspectives**

Most of the characters in the fiction titles were human, with animal characters taking a clear backseat in comparison to picture books of the past where animal fantasy was much more popular (Mikkelsen, 2000). In terms of gender, it appears that a fairly equal number of male and female protagonists are presented in storylines among these books, similar to data from a previous study related to 2005 and 2015 picture books (Brenna et al., 2017). Interestingly, in the current set of picture books there are a few titles that do not specify explicitly, either in text or illustrations, the gender of key characters, including Pendziwol's *Me and You and the Red Canoe* and the two titles by Winters.

Character age was an interesting topic to pursue as most of the titles did not specify in the text what the ages of the characters were. The illustrations offered some information in this regard, but it appears that this trait was considered rather fluidly within this study set. It was interesting to note a number of books with older characters, often in the group by Indigenous authors/illustrators, and to consider whether this is a growing trend to watch. Again, this might relate to shifting audiences for picture book materials, and emerge at some point as a wholly different category of radical.

Child characters were the most common across the study set, with adult characters next, and teen characters appearing in only a few picture books. Cultural differences were also not often specified in the texts of these books, except through evidence of dual language texts where particular languages other than English were included. We noted various shades of skin color included in illustrations, with limited evidence of particular cultural backgrounds other than the visual. Further discussion on this occurs in other papers based on this study set (Tavares et al., 2019).

In terms of the potential audience of these books, we assessed that a number would appeal to older children and/or adults, and this offers further scrutiny of a potential trend noted in previous research (Brenna et al., 2017). Lawson's *Uncle Holland* and Rust's *Tricky* both deal effectively with unlikely, older protagonists; Del Rizzo's *My Beautiful Birds* presents a poignant and yet current picture of the immigration of a Syrian child and includes serious themes; Schwartz's *Town is by the Sea* offers a historical and unsettlingly evocative picture of a mining town. Nicholson's *I Wait*, Thomas's *Nimosham and his Bus*, Campbell's *A Day with Yayah*, Goose's *Sukaq and the Raven*, and Huson's *The Sockeye Mother* present Indigenous knowledge and perspectives original in modern children's literature collections, also with an emphasis on older characters. Wallace offers intriguing and complex autobiographical material in *The Curiosity Cabinet*. Audience age has been identified in previous research (Brenna et al., 2017) as a potentially new aspect of radical, and results from this study encourage further exploration of this topic.

In terms of settings, we noted slightly more rural contexts than urban where these settings were delineated in text and/or illustration, but slightly less than half of the study set included any information to differentiate in this regard. Of the 35 books that depicted rural landscapes, 10 of these were created by Indigenous authors and/or illustrators. One potential interpretation of this is that increasing numbers of Indigenous perspectives in published picture books are enhancing offerings for children related to nature and the natural world around us.

As we considered themes from these contemporary picture books, we were struck by how few seemed to attempt to teach a specific lesson, and how many presented multiple perspectives related to various characters. We also identified aspects of informational texts we found new. For example, Paniaq's *Walrus* included Indigenous expertise about walrus living conditions and interactions with humans and northern animals as well as Inuit traditional uses of the walrus, a perspective not always included in previous non-fiction materials.

One aspect of this study set that was concerning involved a lack of differently abled characters. In three books, an illustration of a bystander using a wheelchair appeared; in Sher's *Away*, reference is made to a hearing aid battery; in Mixer's *The Dog*, we see a very ill child supported by what could be interpreted as a therapy animal; and a minor character with an egg allergy appears in Ritchie's *See What We Eat*. Cuevas's *Smoot* may involve an allegory for depression, Buquet's *Under the Umbrella* follows a man with a stormy heart, and Larsen's *Goodnight, Hockey Fans* depicts a boy with sleep anxiety, but in terms of the total collection we assess a distinct lack of representations of diverse abilities. Diversity and individuality themes do appear more

generally in relation to identity and originality, and titles such as Johnston's *What's My Superpower?*, Snyder's *Jammie Day* and Grant's *The Walking Bathroom* are evidence of emphasis on unique identities.

### **Changing Boundaries**

Although some of the books, such as O'Leary's *You Are Three*, clearly delineated their content for younger readers, and one title, Bolger's *See Fred Run*, specifically offered controlled vocabulary and common sight words for younger children, other titles included complex meanings and syntax in contexts clearly scaffolded with illustrations. Lawson's *Leap!*, for example, elegantly presented the following words with very detailed corresponding pictures: nettled, fidget, haunches, taughten, gambol, and lurch.

Dual languages are included in many of the books by Indigenous authors/illustrators as well as in a couple of other titles. Dunklee's *Me, Me, Me*, a sequel to a previous book *Me, Too!*, presents the tumultuous story of three best friends and includes embedded vocabulary from Swedish, French, and "made up", with translations running vertically page right or left. Non-standard English dialects appear in Hohn's *Malaika's Winter Carnival*, Winters' *Best Pirate*, and Sage's *Stop Feedin' Da Boids!* We suggest further attention to trends around language use in research on future picture books.

Content related to gender roles and sexual orientation was also noted as a possible trend to watch for in future studies. Challenges to traditional gender roles were celebrated in particular storylines such as Spires' *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*, Fullerton's *Hand Over Hand*, DeMont's *I Love My Purse*, and Hart-Sussman's *Seamus' Short Story* as well as the unconventional ending of Cali's *Cinderella and the Furry Slippers*. Additionally, the illustrations in Ritchie's *Federica* displays both parents doing household tasks in contemporary family settings. Other boundaries we explored related to the presence of parents in the content of the books in the study set:

- sometimes single moms or dads were characterized;
- occasionally, especially in the books by Indigenous authors, other adults were featured as important;
- in the larger study set, moms and dads were not particularly featured with equality in terms of breaking gender role stereotypes; and
- same-sex parents were absent from this collection of resources.

Noteworthy emerging themes include individuality/diversity in relation to various aspects of identity, as discussed earlier in this article. In addition, transitions and transformation appear as popular threads in many of the books, along with messages about the value of art and the power of the imagination. Handwritten epistolary letters and notes appear in a number of the titles, pulling back from the digital age, with books such as the following reminding us of a physical pen-and-paper era: Charles' *The Land Beyond the War*; Lawson's *Uncle Holland*; Richards' *I Quit Grade One*; and Sher's *Away*.

### **Other Categories of Change**

Figure 3 depicts trends in numbers of titles as well as prevalence of Indigenous producers in the form of Canadian Indigenous authors and/or illustrators. Overall trends demonstrate numerical

growth, where the total number of picture books in our 2017 sample is 132, in comparison to 57 titles identified in 2005 and 120 in 2015 (Brenna et al., 2017). This brings Indigenous content to 9.8 % of the current study sample, compared to previous results where books by Indigenous authors and/or illustrators comprised 3.5 % of the sample in 2005 and 10% in 2015 (Brenna et al., 2017). As Indigenous content is prioritized in many school curricula across Canada, it will be important to educators to locate contemporary titles to enrich classroom resources.

In terms of gender, Table 1 presents a comparison of percentages related to male and female authorship and illustration. As a number of texts were created by multiple authors and/or illustrators, totals do not add to 100% in some cases. In addition, books like Patterson’s *I am Canada* had many illustrators rather than one, and so none were counted for that text.

We also maintained the collection of data with regards to authors who also illustrated their own books (see Figure 4). In this unique case, in 2005 3 males and 6 females both wrote and illustrated their own books, making up 5% and 11% of the total sample respectively. For the 2015 sample, 9 males and 19 females both wrote and illustrated their own books which represent 8% and 16% respectively. Finally, in 2017, 9 male authors both wrote and illustrated their books while 30 females both wrote and illustrated their books, representing 7% and 23%, respectively.

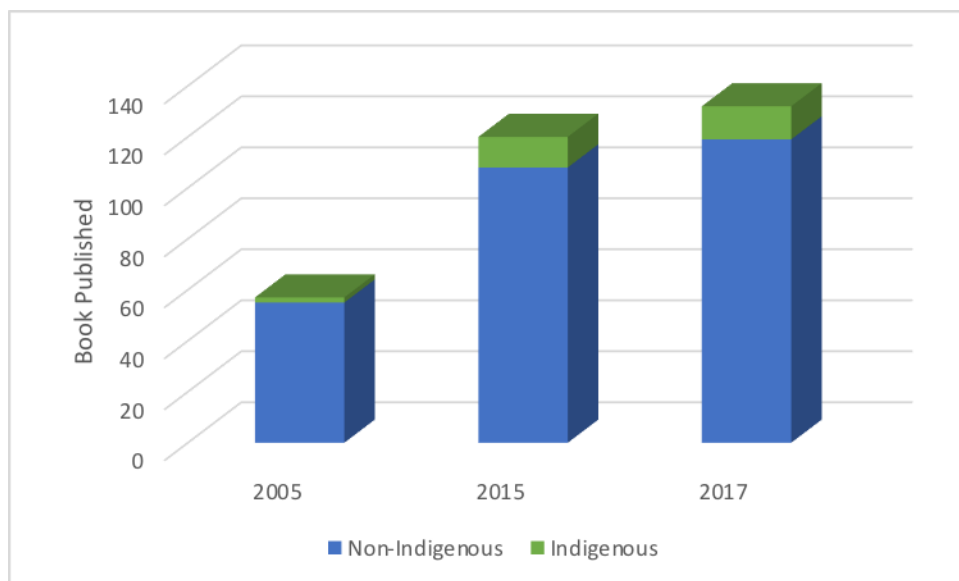


Figure 3 Trends in Numbers of Titles and Prevalence of Indigenous Authors/Illustrators

Table 1

*A Comparison of Percentages Related to Male and Female Authorship and Illustration*

	Male Authorship	Female Authorship
2017	30%	73%
2015	34%	71%
2005	39%	68%
	Male Illustration	Female Illustration
2017	30%	69%
2015	39%	62%
2005	43%	59%

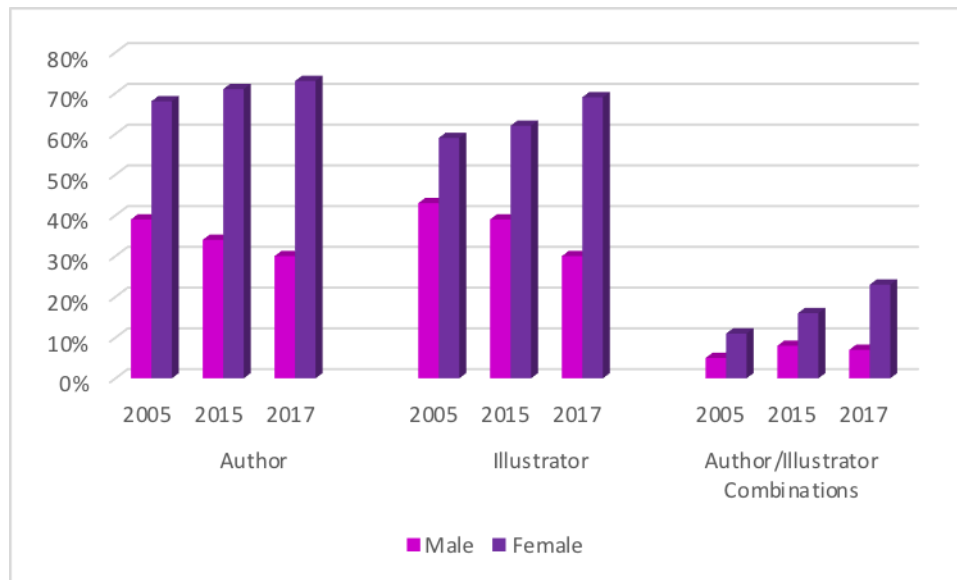


Figure 4 Patterns in Male and Female Authoring and Illustrating (with 2005 and 2015 data according to Brenna et al., 2017)

### Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

It appears that picture book production in Canada is increasing over time in terms of numbers of different books each year. Building on data presented in Brenna, Sun, and Liu (2017), the current study shows a continuation of females authoring, illustrating, and doing both text and illustrations in greater numbers than their male counterparts. Further research is suggested related to location of authors and illustrators, as we wonder whether most of Canadian picture books are created by writers and artists from a few major centres in Canada rather than equally across the country. Additionally, we wonder how author/illustrator location might reflect in content.

Specific questions for future research relate to publication details, such as how many copies of each book are typically produced in the first year. We wonder if publishers may be printing smaller numbers of individual books even though higher numbers of different books are appearing across time. We also wonder how the percentage of self-published titles might compare to professionally published work, as our current study did not include any self-published picture books within its study set. Many of the books did not include page numbers, although with the increase in non-fiction materials, and the potential for more blended genres, it is possible that page numbers will appear as a more common trait in future materials whether they are non-fiction or not.

Further questions arise in relation to author and illustrator details. We wonder why there are more female authors and female illustrators versus male, and why this trend may be occurring. We wonder about the situations of these creators and whether they are employed full time as writers or whether it is an occupation that runs alongside other paid employment. We question whether actual numbers of copies and sales are increasing along with the increase of picture book titles or, is the field saturated, with authors and illustrators selling fewer copies and/or earning less income than they did years ago?

Using Dresang's (1999) original categories for Radical Change has offered interesting results, and we consider how all three headings appear appropriate targets for observing shifts on the ever-changing landscape of children's literature. In terms of Forms and Formats, the presence of hybrids appears to be an especially intriguing result as blurred genres and forms may have interesting results related to reader response. Trends also appear in the prevalence of realistic fiction, fantasy, and non-fiction, with human characters more common than animal characters, and increasing elements to support comprehension.

In terms of Perspectives, we particularly note the absence of characters with disabilities while non-stereotypical presentations of gender appear. Character age and skin colour also emerged as interesting patterns to watch going forward. In particular, this sample of books published in 2017 include a number of non-white characters in illustrations without textual cultural parallels, forwarding the concept of postethnicity as discussed in Johnston and Mangat (2003), and these results are elaborated upon in further papers (Tavares et al., 2019).

In terms of Boundaries, we predict (and hope) that further work addressing and dislodging stereotypes will appear in future titles, and note the inclusion of dual languages in some of these books as a potential trend to watch in future research. Going beyond Dresang's (1999) definition related to this category, we see audience emerging as a particular topic to examine going forward. Picture books appear to be shifting in scope, appealing to a wider age group, and we anticipate physical changes in the way libraries and bookstores may choose to market these titles in future.

We also noticed that many contemporary Canadian picture books present postmodern qualities which overlap with radical change elements. Texts are multimodal, with evidence of blended forms and formats, although non-sequential storylines were not seen to be heavily available in the current study. Many books also ask readers to engage with the text in uncommon ways, encouraging active reading and perhaps reader-engagement. This was noted in the blends related to point of view, where books shifted internally from the "I" to the "You" or the "He/She" to the "You" voices, or even, in two cases, from the "I" to the "He/She" perspectives, appearing as attempts to elicit reader response. We particularly noted blends occurring in non-fiction picture books where authors seemed to be inviting readers into activities or critical thinking related to key topics.

Another place where heightened attempts at engagement were noted involves the addition of extra information—either throughout the text in sidebars or other formats, or at the end of the book, through paragraphs of additional material, writing prompts, and sources to explore. The reader's experience appears to be important to the success of many of the texts in the current study, and effectiveness is deemed to occur when synergistic reading is inspired. Thus, the text, images and their interaction together, appear important for the overall reading and experience of the reader. This pattern related to the addition of sources for further information was also noted in a previous study related to picture books published in 2015, and described in the results of that study as *multidimensional reading* (Brenna et al., 2017), referring to elements that pull readers out of the specific text and into another connected reading experience.

Problematic gaps appeared in relation to particular aspects of diversity and related content, specifically in presentations of ability/disability, and this would be a potential pattern to watch in future materials. It was also noted that particular ethnicities were not defined in many titles from the 2017 study sample with the exception of books by Indigenous authors and/or illustrators where dual language and cultural connections were clearly representative of specific groups. One possible trend to watch is the increase in adult characters over time, and the likelihood of these titles appealing to wider age groups. Edwards and Saltman (2010) remind us that the picture book

is a “relatively recent development within the history of children’s publishing” and is “the only book format that is the exclusive domain of children’s literature” (pp. 3–4). Perhaps the role of the picture book, in terms of audience age, is changing, and further research here is recommended. Studies exploring whether children prefer to read about age-similar characters, or read-up with a focus on teen and adult characters, would be additionally illuminative.

It is anticipated that this snapshot of 132 picture books on the landscape of 2017 resources will offer comparative data related to future titles as we continue to explore Radical Change characteristics and other new patterns in the field of children’s literature. We turn to the future to see what materials will be created for children and potentially adults, what specific titles we might use to inspire learning, and what studies emerge to further identify new traits and gaps in the field. Our study set remains intact so that others who wish to explore further connections to children’s literature in this time and place might have the resources to do so.

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## Appendix A: Bibliography of Canadian Picture Books Used in Study Set (n = 132)

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**Appendix B: Picture Book Data Collection Chart (adapted from Brenna et al. 2017)**

Title/ Author Name & Gender/Year	Main Character(s) Name/ Age/ Gender	Genre*	Audience Age*	Point of View*	Format*	Conventions for Readability*	New Perspectives*	Changing Boundaries*	Parents*	Setting*	Story and time frame*	Theme

\*\*Notes were also taken for "Other" regarding additional information emerging from the texts

Specific Analysis Details Relating to \*:

- \*Genre: Realistic Fiction; Historical Fiction; Fantasy-animal; Fantasy-human based in real world; Fantasy-human based in other world; Science Fiction; Mystery; Non-fiction; Narrative non-fiction; Other (specify)
- \*Audience Age: Birth-7; Junior 8+; Intermediate 11+; Young Adult 14+; Adult (for multiple audience, include all e.g., J/I/YA)
- \*Point of View: First Person/Third Person; Present/Past Tense
- \*Format: Sequential/Non-sequential in terms of time
- \*Conventions for Readability (specify): Header? Chapter Titles? Use of Italics for...? Bold Print for...? etc.
- \*New Perspectives (specify): Multiple Perspectives; Previously Unheard Voices (e.g.: exceptionalism; minority culture; dialect; minority sexual orientation; occupation; socio-economic level)
- \*Changing Boundaries (specify): Subjects previously forbidden; new Settings; Unresolved Endings
- \*Parents: 1/2/specify marital status
- \*Setting: Landscape (urban, rural, unknown)/Context (Canadian, non-Canadian, unknown)
- \*Storyframe: Days/Weeks/Months/Years/Unknown; Timeframe: Contemporary/Past/Unknown