Article

When Authenticity Goes Missing: How Monocultural Children's Literature Is Silencing the Voices and Contributing to Invisibility of Children from Minority Backgrounds

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Abstract: The importance of recognising, valuing and respecting a child's family, culture, language and values is central to socially just education and is increasingly articulated in educational policy worldwide. Inclusive children's literature can support children's human rights and contribute to equitable and socially just outcomes for all children. However, evidence suggests many educational settings provide monocultural book collections which are counterproductive to principles of diversity and social justice. Further, that educators' understandings and beliefs about diversity can contribute to inequitable provision and use of diverse books and to inequitable outcomes of book sharing for many children. This paper reports on a larger study investigating factors and relationships influencing the use of children's literature to support principles of cultural diversity in the kindergarten rooms of long day care centres. The study was conducted within an ontological perspective of constructivism and an epistemological perspective of interpretivism informed by sociocultural theory. A mixed methods approach was adopted, and convergent design was employed interpret significant relationships and their meanings. Twenty-four educators and 110 children from four long day care centres in Western Australia participated. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, video-based observations, field notes, document analysis and a book audit. This study firstly identified that current book collections in kindergarten rooms of long day care centres promote mono-cultural viewpoints and 'othering' of minority groups through limited access to books portraying inclusive and authentic cultural diversity. Secondly, that educators had limited understandings of the role of literature in acknowledging and valuing diversity and rarely used it to promote principles of diversity, resulting in a practice of "othering" those from minority group backgrounds. The key challenges which emerged from the study concerned beliefs, understanding and confidence of educators about diversity and inclusion, and the impact of these on their approaches to promoting principles of diversity through the use of children's books. This research contributes to discussion on the value of children's literature in achieving international principles of diversity. These findings have important social justice implications. The outcomes of this study have implications for educators, policy makers, early childhood organisations and those providing higher education and training for early childhood educators.

Keywords: diversity; inclusion; inclusive education; early childhood education; children's literature; social justice; educators' beliefs and understandings

1. Introduction

The importance of recognising, valuing and respecting a child's family, culture, language and values is central to socially just education and is increasingly articulated in educational policy worldwide. The concept and importance of multicultural education has become a topical and widely researched social justice issue centring on the concepts of understanding, respect and value for the diversity that exists within society [1–5]. Evidence shows that the extent to which an early childhood educational centre caters for diversity can have strong implications for children's future educational success [6].

1.1. Children's Literature to Support Principles of Diversity

One way in which educators can address diversity is through the use of inclusive literature as an enabler of "culturally responsive pedagogy" [7] with educators playing an important role as mediators between the literature texts and the children. When educators use culturally responsive pedagogy through literature, they actively involve children in engaging with diverse literature and exploring meaning, ideas, viewpoints, ideas and responses to books that reflect their own worlds and, importantly, the world of those different to themselves [8–10].

A review of existing research reveals considerable evidence that children's literature can serve as a useful resource for supporting principles of diversity [1,7,11–17]. These studies demonstrate the importance of introducing diversity in literature from birth. Further, they highlight the significance of including racial diversity as a way of introducing children to others who are different to themselves. Yet, despite this potential, evidence suggests that early education and care settings in English speaking countries, including Australia, often provide monocultural, exclusive and potentially biased literature [13,17–19]. Continual exposure to such literature can cumulatively impact on children's long-term attitudes and perceptions of diversity and well-being [13,17–20]. Other evidence suggests that many educators hold limited understandings and beliefs about diversity which can contribute to inequitable provision and use of diverse books and to inequitable outcomes of book sharing for many children [17,18,21].

1.2. Defining Diversity in the Context of This Paper

The term "diversity" is generally held to encompass a broad range of differences; these include differences in age, race, colour, religion, ethnicity, gender, languages and sexual orientation. Additionally, it can include aspects such as socio-economic background, education, work experience and physical and mental capabilities [22]. In 1989, the Australian Government ratified The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [23] which placed principles of diversity at the centre of consideration for the education and care of young children. This declaration explicitly reinforces the aspects of diversity as defined above as well as also referring to nations of origin, the values of those nations and respect for those from different civilisations. Several of these aspects are closely related and can be grouped broadly under race and culture.

Rudine Sims Bishop [1], arguably one of the most influential scholars in the field of multicultural education, calls for multicultural education to be focused on all children and asserts that multicultural literature should be inclusive and comprehensive and incorporate "books that reflect(ed) the racial, ethnic and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and the world" [1] (p. 3). Bishop claims that "race or colour is one of the most, if not the most divisive issues in society" [1] (p. 3) and thus examines issues relating to the use of multicultural literature from and about people of colour. Other researchers such as Boutte et al. [13] take the viewpoint that multicultural education should be for all children, but they focus on the issues of culture and race as areas having the greatest impact on promoting multicultural education. Given the evidence of these and other researchers, this paper will focus particularly on the concepts of race and culture within the framework of diversity.

1.3. The Australian Context

In Australia, early childhood education was brought under national policies for the first time in 2008. Since then, the education of young children has been included in the National Quality Agenda (NQA), the National Quality Framework (NQF) and subsequently governed by the National Quality Standard (NQS) [24] which incorporates the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) [25] as the guiding framework for the curriculum of all early education and care settings for children aged 0–5 years of age. A key component of this framework establishes principles to guide practice and sets goals to be achieved in relation to the recognition of, and provision for, diversity. Importantly, the framework recommends

the use of children's literature to develop literacy skills and to explore how texts can construct identities and stereotypes.

In order to meet NQS, it is important for all elements of childcare play and learning environments, resources and educator practices to reflect a consideration of diversity. Therefore, educators must carefully consider current practice and make informed judgements on aspects of practice that may need to change to ensure standards are met, as well as identifying any existing practice that may be counterproductive. One way of meeting the goals, principles and practices described in the policy frameworks is using quality children's literature. The value of books has been recognised in the EYLF [25]. The EYLF advocates the use of quality literature for engaging children with text and the meaning it constructs. Importantly, this framework recognises that children need the opportunity to engage with books that reflect both familiar and unfamiliar cultural representations [25] Thus, highlighting the importance for educators to consider the types of texts they need to select in the interest of promoting children's social, emotional and literacy development through recognition of diversity.

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1.4. Challenges in Addressing and Responding to Diversity

A body of evidence suggests that early childhood educators, including those in Australia [26], face challenges in both understanding and responding to diversity in their classrooms [7,27]. Evidence across the years suggests that educators often see their role in addressing diversity as being related to teaching children the English language [26] or assimilating and socialising children into the dominant culture [26,28–31].

Children begin to develop an awareness and recognition of diversity early in life [31,32]. Bar-Haim et al. found in a 2006 study of 36 infants that children develop a bias towards their own race as early as three to six months of age [33]. In Australia, the work of McNaughton through the Preschool Equity and Social Diversity study [3] found pre-school children to have strong awareness of colour and race including the association of these with power. McNaughton further highlighted that children define both themselves and others through these understandings [3]. Evidence suggests that exploring race and culture, including through literature and literature discussion, can contribute to children's worldviews and the development of their sense of identity and well-being. However, an environment in which discussion of race and difference are avoided leads to a "colour blind" environment in which the unique histories, cultures, values and experiences of minority groups are ignored or forgotten [34].

Evidence suggests that educators are often hesitant to discuss issues relating to equality, power, values and attitudes because they lack confidence and knowledge compounded by a lack of resources [21]. Others suggest that educators may avoid talking about race and racial issues, believing that children are too young for such discussions [35,36] or that some educators hold concerns that such a discussion might be considered racist in itself [35]. Still others construct children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as being "other" and take a viewpoint that the most important focus for these children is to learn to speak

English [26,37]. Many of these educators also aim to assimilate children into the dominant culture, often viewing the children's own backgrounds as "burdens" or challenges and thus teaching about diversity can often be superficial or tokenistic [26,38]. In addition, some educators mistakenly believe that one book about a particular cultural group is adequate to portray that group's viewpoints and perspectives [39]. Such beliefs can influence the curriculum decisions made by educators thus potentially further contributing to practices that may unwittingly reinforce a perception of the dominant culture as being preferable or superior.

In contrast, there is some evidence that some educators working in culturally and linguistically diverse settings and having a high level of cultural competence can still use books to teach in a culturally responsive way even when those books do not reflect diversity [39]. Ultimately, this suggests that interactions between pedagogical practices, children's literature and children's learning will depend, in part, upon educators' professional knowledge, their training, confidence, skills and judgements and the quality and relevance of the literature they share with children. Despite this, there is a gap in the evidence on how educators' understandings of diversity impact on their pedagogy and practice [26]. In addition, while the potential for literature to support principles of diversity has been established, the implications for childcare and other early years' settings in Australia have not yet been fully explored.

Therefore, given the important role educators play as mediators between the literature texts and the children, it is important to investigate both the attitudes and practices of educators. Further, given the mandated requirements of the NQF, including those of the EYLF, research on the implications of using literature to address principles of diversity in early childhood education and care has the potential to add to the debate and inform future directions.

1.5. Investigating the Understandings and Practices of Educators

This paper reports on a study which investigated the factors and relationships influencing the use of children's literature to support principles relating to cultural diversity in the kindergarten rooms of long day care centres in Australia. The study was conducted within an ontological perspective of constructivism and an epistemological perspective of interpretivism informed by sociocultural theory [40–42]. A mixed methods approach was adopted, and convergent design employed to synthesise the qualitative and quantitative data and interpret significant relationships and their meanings [42].

This paper reports on the following research questions:

- What are educators' understandings and beliefs of the role of children's literature in supporting principles of diversity?
- How do educators select and use children's literature to promote principles of diversity?

1.6. Ethics

The research was conducted with ethical approval granted through (University name and ethics number removed for review). Participants were given an information letter outlining the purpose of the research and their involvement. They were informed about confidentiality and security and their right to withdraw. All participants agreed to take part and signed a consent form.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Context

The study was conducted in the kindergarten rooms of five long day care centres in Western Australia selected by stratified purposeful sampling informed by data from the 2011 Australian Census [43]. Such sampling allowed for the selection of regions of diverse demographics including differing socio-economic profiles, varied ethnic population concentrations and urban and rural communities. Stratified purposeful sampling is particularly useful to study different models of implementing a particular teaching and learning

strategy [44,45], in this case, that of book sharing with young children. This allowed for greater generalisability and transferability of findings as well as specific findings relevant to each participating centre.

Long day care centres in Western Australia operate in purposefully built or adapted buildings and provide full-time or part-time care usually for birth to five years. Long day care centres are owned and managed by, local councils, community organisations, non-profit organisations and private operators. All of these services must be operated in accordance with the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations [24].

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

2.2. Research Participants and Selection

Twenty-four educators agreed to take part in the research, with qualifications ranging from an Education Assistant Diploma (6 months of study) to a Bachelor of Education (four years of study). The participants recruited included each centre coordinator and the educators in the kindergarten rooms of the centres. The children in the participating kindergarten room of each centre also took part. The parents of the children were invited to give informed consent for observation of children's participation and engagement in book sharing and use. There were 110 child participants. The four centres and all participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Demographic information for each of the participant centres is summarised in Table 1. The community demographic data were drawn from the 2011 Australian Census (ABS, 2011) and the participants' qualifications and experience data were drawn from the semi-structured interviews.

2.3. Data Sources

For the purpose of this paper, data were drawn from:

- An audit of 2413 children's books.
- 3 h and 35 min of recorded interviews with educators.
- 148 video recorded observations of book sharing sessions.
- 119 A4 pages of researcher's handwritten field notes.

These multiple data sources provided opportunities for triangulation of findings, thus enabling validation of themes by cross checking information.

2.3.1. Book Audit

An audit was conducted of all children's books available for use in each kindergarten room (n = 2413). A software programme called Book Collector was used in conjunction with an ISBN scanning app called CLZ Barry on an iPhone 5 to record the publishing details of the books. The results of the book audit are reported in another paper (removed for peer review) but summarised in this paper in order to make comparison between the book data, the interview data and the practice of the educators.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants and participant centres.

Ownership/Operation/Location Note: Pseudonyms Are Used for Centre Names	% High Income Household (Higher than $2000 per Week)	% Low Income Earners (Less than $600 a Week)	Overseas Born Population-% of Total Population	Speaks a Language Other Than English at Home-% of Total Population	% of Total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	Participant Role	Participant Pseudonym	Industry Experience	Time in This Centre	Highest Qualification	Other Qualification	Other Information	No. of Other Educators	No. of Child Participants
Riverview: Not for profit centre Western Suburb of Perth Metropolitan Area	47.3% (Includes 13% > $4000)	13%	34%	15.7%	0.18% Below national percentage of overall pop (3%)	Centre Coordinator	Jill	20–25 years	9 years	Bachelor of Children's Services	Diploma of Child Psychology	Also holds nursing qualificat-ion and Cert iv	5	36
						Lead Educator Kindergar-ten Room	Michelle	15–20 years	2 years	Bachelor of Arts Early Childhood Education	N/A	Qualificat-ion gained in Ireland		
Community House Not for profit centre Northern suburbs of Perth Metropolitan Area Funded by WA Dept. of Local Govt.	13.9% (Includes 0.7% > $4000)	22.8%	53%	57%	4.3% Above national percentage of overall pop (3%)	Centre Coordinator	Warren	25–30 years	6 months	Diploma of Leadership and Management	Associate Diploma of Child Services	Nil	4	22
						Lead Educator Kindergar-ten Room	Lily	0–5 years	4 months	Honours Degree in Early Childhood Education	N/A	Qualifica-tion gained in Ireland		
Dockside Not for profit centre outer suburb of Perth Metropolitan Area	17.6% (Includes 1.5% > $4000)	30.7%	40%	9.8%	1.4% Below national percentage of overall pop	Centre Coordinator	Tracy	10–15 years	2 years	Diploma of Children's Services	Cert iii	Nil	4	34
						Lead Educator Kindergar-ten Room	Alice	0–5 years	5 years	Diploma of Children's Services	Cert iii	Working to BSc in Early Child-hood		
Argyle Not for profit centre remote north east of Western Australia	33% (Includes 4.8% > $4000)	10.5%	15.8%	11.6%	25.8% Well above national percentage of overall pop (3%)	Centre Coordinator	Sarah	30–35 years	0–5 years	Diploma of Children's Services	Cert iii	Nil	3 (2 from local Abor-iginal langua-ge Centre and visited once in the observ-ation period).	18
						Lead Educator Kindergar-ten Room	Debbie	25–30 years	5 months	Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education	Cert iii	Nil		

2.3.2. Interview Data

The Centre Coordinator and the Lead Educator from each centre were interviewed at the start of the study. Educators were asked about their experience, their understandings and practice relating to selecting and using children's literature, and their understandings of children's literature in relation to the EYLF. Supplementary Appendix SI presents the Semi Structured Interview Framework used in this study.

Additionally, incidental unstructured interviews and member checking interviews took place throughout the study with most educators. Interviews were recorded using a Phillips Digital Voice Tracer 7000 Conference Recorder device. The initial interviews were transcribed by a transcription service with subsequent incidental and member checking interviews transcribed by the researcher. These were returned to each participant for member checking and clarification. In one centre, the Lead Educator declined being recorded and, therefore, detailed notes were taken during interviews and member checking took place during the observation visit period.

2.3.3. Book Sharing Data and Detailed Observation Spreadsheet

Video recorded observations were made of all book sharing sessions involving an educator and one or more children over a period of five consecutive weekdays in each centre. The book sharing sessions were all part of the daily programme of each participant room.

The researcher designed a detailed observation spreadsheet to record details relating to the book sharing sessions. For the purpose of this paper, data relating to the book sharing sessions in which educators reported an intention to include a focus or acknowledgment of diversity were extracted. Data included the stated intention of the session, the book used for the session and the associated analyses of each book regarding the cultural diversity categories and viewpoint and ideologies of each book.

2.3.4. Field Notes

The educator kept detailed field notes during each observation period. These assisted the researcher to crosscheck data and to ensure reliable and unbiased judgment could be made through comparison and triangulation with all data sources.

2.4. Data Analysis

All books (n = 2413) were analysed for representation of cultural diversity using The Cultural Diversity Categories Framework developed from the work of Bishop [1,11,12,16]. As a result, each book was categorised into one of the following categories: Culturally Authentic, Culturally Generic, Culturally Neutral, Solely Caucasian or No People. The framework including detailed descriptors of each category is included as Appendix SII (in supplementary).

While this framework provided one measure of viewpoints and ideologies in books containing human characters, a large number of books in the study contained only non-human characters and "these, too, portray social viewpoints and ideologies that may be harder to distinguish than books containing people and identifying these viewpoints and ideologies was important to the study" [46] (p. 822). Therefore, secondary analysis was carried out using a purposeful sample of all books shared by educators using the Viewpoints and Ideologies Framework developed from the work of Boutte et al. [13] (Supplementary Appendix SII). This framework and detailed description are included as Supplementary Appendix SIII.

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

The semi-structured interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's [47] five stages of thematic analysis interviews through an inductive approach in which 'frequent,

dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data emerge from the application of a systematic analytical process" [48].

Observation data were analysed as part of the thematic analysis already outlined in order to identify educator self-reported, documented and observed use of children's literature texts through book sharing. Where relevant, results were transformed into numerical data to enable creation of diagrams, charts and tables and allow for triangulation and comparison with other data and across contexts.

Thus, the triangulation of the data sets was undertaken throughout the analysis process during these stages to allow the identification of concepts presented in the datasets and for comparison and contrast. This allowed the researcher to synthesise the themes and interpret significant relationships and their meanings.

3. Results and Discussion

Three interrelated key findings emerged from this study. First, there was limited access to books portraying inclusive and authentic cultural diversity. Second, educator understandings showed restricted understanding and/or confidence related to the selection and use of children's literature as a resource for meeting principles related to cultural diversity. Third, educator practice when using books to address diversity resulted in the "othering" of those from minority backgrounds. These themes and their relationships are discussed in this section.

3.1. Limited Access to Books Portraying Inclusive and Authentic Cultural Diversity

The books used and available to be used in all centres overwhelmingly portrayed dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies. This study found that the majority of books did not portray cultural diversity. Only 18% of the 2413 books across the four centres contained any representation of cultural diversity. Further, only 2% were classified as Culturally Authentic (See Supplementary Appendix SI). The representation of non-dominant cultural groups in the other 16% was largely stereotypical or tokenistic.

During the study, 221 books were observed being used in book sharing between educators and children. As shown in Figure 1, 20% of these contained some cultural diversity, however, only one percent of were from the Culturally Authentic category and these were all used in the same centre (Community House).
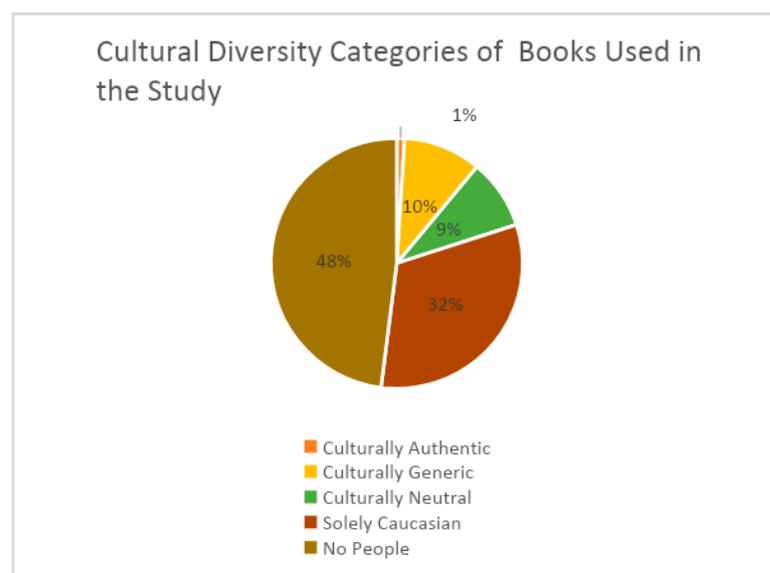

Figure 1. Cultural diversity categories of books used in the study.

In addition, the books used, as with the total collection of books, overwhelmingly portrayed dominant culture ideologies and viewpoints (see Supplementary Appendix SII), as has been found by others [13,49]. As shown in Figure 2, the analysis of the viewpoint and ideologies of the books used in the study showed that only 1% portrayed the ideologies and viewpoints of a non-dominant culture.
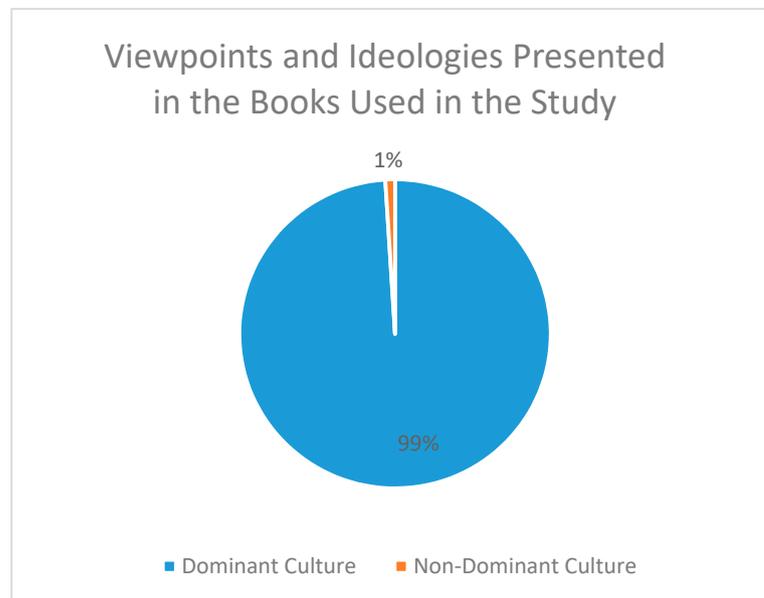
Figure 2. Ideologies and viewpoint of books used.

While more detail of the analysis and results of the book audit can be viewed in an associated paper (removed for peer review), it is important to note here that the limited book collection both impacted on and was impacted by the other findings and these will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2. Restricted Educator Understandings and Confidence

Overall, this study found that the educators involved were grappling with an awareness of the importance of addressing cultural diversity and their developing understanding of what this means and should look like in practice. The educators were actively attempting to address the principles of diversity as described in the EYLF, but challenges were evident. Most educators showed no evidence of considering the potential of exploring and promoting cultural diversity through the selection and use of books and demonstrated limited understandings and confidence related to them doing so. Furthermore, the evidently limited understandings and confidence extended to their selection of children's books for the specific purpose of exploring and promoting cultural diversity and, more generally, in recognition that diverse books should be an integral part of their book collections and book sharing practices.

Three patterns emerged that were related to this finding. These concerned the educators' perception of their knowledge about books related to diversity and their understandings of the issues of diversity and how these may be addressed. These patterns along with descriptions and examples are provided below.

Pattern One: We know that we do not know: Some educators reported that including books about culture and backgrounds is important but that they lacked confidence when selecting books, expressing a fear of not knowing what is authentic or "politically correct".

For example, Jill (Coordinator: Riverview) was concerned about the challenge of providing books relating to the backgrounds and cultures of all children when she said, "Will they (books) represent all the different nationalities, cultures, thoughts, family backgrounds that we have here." Sarah (Coordinator: Argyle) also spoke of these concerns:

"Um this is important . . . (inaudible) . . . try to cover all different cultures as well which is a bit tricky so I couldn't get lots of books that cover that but compensated with . . . bit hard to know what is politically correct in the (local area) compared to other places."

Pattern Two: We know and it is about language preservation: Some educators talked about the provision and use of books to preserve or teach Aboriginal or "other" languages as meeting the requirement to include culturally diverse books. They described their fear of not being able to pronounce the words in these languages "correctly" and explained that this was why they relied on audio devices or on others with expertise in the language. Some of the educators in this category expressed the view that as children already see diversity every day, they need books that focus on language rather than those which reflect diversity more generally.

For example, Warren (Coordinator: Community House) said, "So we've recently purchased a whole range of books that focus on the Indigenous culture, particularly looking at Noongar culture and the (local) tribe which is the local community within this area." He went on to explain that he saw this as a starting point to help children explore diversity, "Which again helps the children start to explore the concept of different cultures and the diversity of people in general." Warren then expressed a belief that children in his centre were already familiar with, and understanding of, diversity:

> We are blessed in this Centre; we have so many different cultures attending this service that I mean to the children it's just second nature to see someone that you know may look different or sound different to you know . . . have different ways about them and I think you know books that we purchase or could look at buying, would only support that.

Pattern Three: We know, and we have got this—it is about celebrations, difference and the special/exotic. Most participants confidently expressed the belief that the requirements related to diversity were met through selecting and using books to teach about cultural celebrations and customs with a focus on the special or exotic.

For example, Tracy (Coordinator: Dockside) was clear that educators in Dockside were expected to place a focus on cultural celebrations, "So, I say to the girls to . . . looking at different celebrations that happen through the calendar and obviously enabling children to learn a little bit more . . . ".

Alice (Lead Educator: Dockside) was very positive about her perceived success in incorporating Tracy's requirements and in doing so referred specifically to a book about celebrations around the world that had been purchased for this purpose. "So, all of those have been really successful. All our multi-cultural events have been really, really successful, so we do four a month and we . . . we just keep linking back to that book."

In summary, educators expressed a belief in the importance of giving attention to cultural diversity. When describing how this belief was enacted, the educators mostly referred to book selection and sharing that focused on celebrations, or the "different" or "special" aspects of "other" cultures. The high level of confidence with which educators talked about this contrasted noticeably with their hesitation and uncertainty when describing how they respond to children's backgrounds, being "politically correct" or pronunciation of minority group languages.

3.3. Book Reading Practices: The "Othering" of Those from Minority Backgrounds

Overall, this study found that the current book sharing practice in kindergarten rooms of these four long day care centres promotes monocultural viewpoints and "othering" of minority groups.

The educators' practice was found to reinforce dominant culture ideologies and viewpoints. In the vast majority of book sharing, portrayal of themes relating to minority groups was absent and, as such, invisible, in the books used for these purposes. Table 2 shows the very small amount of educator attention given to the book sharing with a focus on diversity.

Table 2. Educator-led book sharing sessions and those with intentional focus on diversity.

Centre	Number Educator Sessions Overall	Number Focused on Diversity	% of Ed Time
Riverview	51	2	6%
Community House	47	6	14%
Dockside	29	3	7%
Argyle	21	0	0%

3.3.1. Book Sharing without Educator Attention to Diversity

In the sessions without an intentional focus on diversity, while there were no overtly negative viewpoints of minority cultures conveyed in educator practice, neither were there any that were positive. It could be argued that educator practice was founded on the assumption of shared understandings and that the themes explored in the books would be of interest and relevant to all children. Thus, this suggests that the lived experiences of those children from minority backgrounds were largely ignored. In the few cases among these sessions where the book used did reflect some cultural diversity, the educators focused on language development such as labelling and describing; imagination, fantasy or humour; or disposition and life lessons, with no attention given by educators to diversity. In a few of these books, a small number of non-Caucasian characters played a secondary or minor role, most often simply being present in illustrations. The presence of characters from various races can to some extent "normalise" diversity by providing children with images more likely to reflect the diversity of the playgrounds and community of the children. However, the background and incidental portrayal of minority cultures can further accentuate the key role and dominance of Caucasian characters and thus promote dominant culture perspectives. Such promotion of monocultural viewpoints contributes to the "othering" of those from minority culture backgrounds [26,50,51].

While the educators' teaching experience varied from less than five to close to 30 years, with some having several years' experience in culturally and linguistically diverse settings, they were not found to promote culturally responsive practice when using children's books. This is in contrast to the findings of Blakeney-Williams and Daly [39] who found that some experienced educators working in culturally and linguistically diverse education settings can promote inclusive practice even when using books that do not reflect diverse cultures and languages when they "help children to make connections between the ideas in picture books and their own worlds" [39] (p. 49). However, the educators in this study largely assumed shared understandings of all children and did not encourage or model the making of connections to the diverse lives and backgrounds of the children.

3.3.2. Intentional Focus on Diversity

When educators' book sharing practice with an intentional focus on diversity was analysed, two main themes emerged. The most dominant was labelled "othering", a term also used by other researchers [26,50,51] to describe a focus on non-dominant cultures as different, strange or exotic. The practice of "othering" was consistent with the educator understanding reported earlier of Pattern Three: We know, and we have got this—it is about celebrations, difference and the special/exotic. Interestingly, the practice of the educators who had expressed Pattern One: We know that we do not know, was among the practice that promoted "othering", suggesting that while grappling with uncertainty and developing awareness, they tended to focus on superficial notions of culture and diversity.

Another view dominated in two of the centres where Aboriginal children came from communities where a local language was spoken, and a third centre attempting to be inclusive of a Chinese speaking child and this theme was labelled "language preservation". In these centres, attention to diversity was restricted to promoting the local language, with assistance from Aboriginal language speakers and/or audio recordings of texts produced in the target language and was consistent with the educator understanding reported earlier of Pattern Two: We know and it is about language preservation.

Table 3 gives details of the specific sessions in which educators intentionally focused on diversity. The table includes the nature of the educator focus, the associated pattern of understanding and the cultural diversity category of each book used.

Table 3. Details of book sharing sessions with an intentional focus on cultural diversity.

Centre/Book	Nature of Session Focus	Pattern of Understanding	Cultural Diversity Category of Book	Number of Sessions	Time (mins)	% of over-all Ed Time
Riverview/1	special/other	3	Generic	1	17.50	
Riverview/2	special/other	3	Generic	1	9.00	
TOTALS				2	26.5	6
Community/1	special/other	3	Authentic	1	9.00	
Community/2	Language	2	Authentic	2	10.00	
Community/3	language	2	Authentic	3	16.5	
TOTALS				6	25.5	14.5
Dockside/1	language	2	Generic	1	3	
Dockside/2	special/other	3	Generic	1	8.5	
Dockside/3	language	3	Generic	1	9.5	
TOTALS				3	11.5	7

In the limited time that educators intentionally focused on diversity, their practice reinforced majority viewpoints and promoted the "othering" of minority groups as described earlier. This belief was reflected in an emphasis on the special, exotic or different aspects of cultures, often promoting misconceptions about "other cultures" through generalisations such as, "In Portugal they like to wear fruit on their heads" (Rhiannon: Dockside). Educators, also appeared not to consider the possible lived experience of the children in their care, preferring instead to promote further "othering" through the frequent use of terms such as "special". Thus, the practice highlighted and reinforced educators' perceptions of difference. For example, Betty in Riverside highlighted, "See he's wearing a special scarf on his head", and, "This mummy dresses differently to me or to your mummy because she comes from another country, so she wears different clothes". Betty appeared to overlook the possibility that the children might see such dress as usual in their lived experience. Such comments risk confusing or demeaning children whose family or community members wear similar clothing as part of their contemporary life. For other children, this could promote a viewpoint that those people they see in the community wearing this type of clothing are "different" or "other".

Additionally, educators made incidental reference to superficial aspects of culture such as dress, food and clothing, thus reinforcing stereotypes. These findings are similar to those of others [26,52,53] who found that when cultural diversity is addressed or examined in classrooms, it largely remains at a superficial or perfunctory level. Such approaches fail to provide children with accurate and current information or insight into the daily lives of people from different cultures and backgrounds [26].

Furthermore, educators' practice showed that while they met the EYLF requirement of "sharing the enjoyment of language and texts" [5] (p. 28), they neglected that of using books to begin "to understand and evaluate ways in which texts construct identities and create stereotypes" [25] (p. 28). It could be argued that in order to meet this requirement, educators would need to draw children's attention to the construction of stereotypes in the books they used. Rather, this study found that educators' practice actively contributed to further promotion of stereotypical viewpoints related to minority cultures.

The educators' patterns of understandings related to cultural diversity impacted on, and was reflected in, the selection of books which they saw as intentionally focused on diversity. The evidence showed that most books chosen for this purpose were classified as culturally generic; that is, they promoted dominant culture viewpoints and ideologies. As discussed earlier, this encouraged book sharing practices which contributed to the "othering" of minority groups by promoting practices and lifestyles of the minority culture as being different or special as evident in Pattern Three of educator understanding. Such

evidence suggests that the type of book chosen by educators directly impacts the resulting practice when using these books, as others [13,54,55] have found.

Even when educators used culturally authentic texts, the book sharing practice which followed reflected the "othering" of minority cultures. Such practice, consistent with Pattern Two of educator understandings, was seen where educators used culturally authentic books with the intention of preserving or acknowledging a minority group language. In these cases, educators' fear of "not getting it right" or not being "politically correct" resulted in the partial or complete transfer of responsibility for the sharing session to members of the non-dominant culture familiar with the language through the use of audio recording to "read" the story". In these sessions, educators either did not discuss the books with the children at all, thus missing an opportunity to promote principles of diversity, or defaulted to pointing out exotic aspects of the story.

These educators' intention of valuing and recognising the language backgrounds and mother tongues of some of the children in their centres showed respect [56]. They were well motivated in intending to support the use and preservation of local Aboriginal children's mother tongue. As shown in Table 3, the educators in Argyle did not conduct any book sharing focused on diversity themselves, these educators spoke of this being the responsibility of the local cultural group itself and this was linked to their expressed uncertainty of "getting it right". However, this centre did partner with the local Aboriginal language centre and held in their book collection culturally authentic bilingual books and accompanying audio pens from the language centre. It could be argued that this was evidence of Argyle working towards "the participation of Indigenous Australian education workers in the delivery of non-SAE, in partnership with classroom teachers who do not have non-SAE expertise" [56] (p. 58). It could also be argued that the use of the specially purchased culturally authentic bilingual texts with accompanying audio recordings in Community House is evidence of a similar goal and sensitivity.

However, the apparent reluctance of the educators in both centres to use the texts beyond a narrow linguistic focus not only ignored the essential cultural context of language use, but resulted in missed opportunities to draw the majority group of monolingual English speaking children in these centres "into the multilingual and linguistically rich world of Indigenous Australian languages" [56] (p. 56). It also appeared that the educators may have not recognised the opportunity for such book sharing to bring benefits to all children in the centres by encouraging critical appreciation of Aboriginal culture and tradition [57]. For example, in one session, Lily in Community House pointed to a character in traditional dress holding a spear and asked the children "Oh, does he look scary?" appearing to promote a stereotypical viewpoint. Additionally, she overlooked the potential of this image and the children's interest in it as an opportunity to educate the children about some Aboriginal people being hunter gatherers or their role as custodians of the land [57]. In this way, the practice defaulted to that of "othering".

"Othering" was seen in another example where a culturally authentic book was selected by a child and shared with an educator. While the educator, Bethany, made some attempts to help the children participating to see similarities as well as differences to the lifestyles portrayed in the book, her overall practice highlighted the "different" and "special" nature of the cultural group represented in the book. Consistent with Pattern Three, this suggests that even when using culturally authentic books, well intentioned educators may lack the understandings, beliefs and confidence needed to promote principles of diversity.

Educators' confidence about and focus on diversity appeared to be influenced by children's attention to aspects of it. For instance, Yaz (a Riverview child) pointed to a book character with similar visual features to herself and remarked, "That's me", Louise, an educator, attempted to engage her in conversation, saying "Is that you Yaz? Does she look a bit like you?" Similarly, another educator, Bethany, appeared more confident discussing similarities between minority and majority cultures when a child (Levi) drew her attention to activities or objects in the books by making connections between them and

what was familiar with statements such as, "It's like a toothbrush". Therefore, it appears that one possible way to address principles of diversity using literature could be to allow children's voices to be heard through giving them control of some of the talk around books. Evidence demonstrates that when educators encourage children to respond to and discuss characters, situations and events in inclusive books it "helps children to identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity" [8] (p. 24). Furthermore, this engagement helps children to connect to characters which assists in developing empathy and intercultural understandings [10]. These types of approaches would be enhanced by access to culturally authentic books which reflected a range of cultural viewpoints, including those familiar to children attending the day care centre.

However, the lack of educator confidence and understandings related to diversity could still possibly inhibit the effectiveness of this type of approach. For instance, in Community House, Levi, twice pointed out a "black girl" in text illustrations, Bethany ignored this reference to colour, and directed attention to activities and objects represented instead. Bethany appeared to avoid or "silence" the topic of colour or race, an educator behaviour also identified by Beneke and Cheatham [35]. Such avoidance can contribute to a "colourblind" approach that misses opportunities to influence and develop positive attitudes towards race in children [58]. Furthermore, colour is one of the most divisive issues in society and failing to include or address it constitutes a "glaring omission" [1] (p. 35).

Of interest in these two examples of a child drawing attention to the visual features of a character and the educators' response, is that Yaz was from a minority culture background and when she commented, "That's me," Louise appeared to be confident to attempt to discuss visual features associated with race. However, when Levi, a Caucasian child, twice pointed out and commented on a "black girl", Bethany ignored his comment, preferring to discuss other aspects such as objects and activities. There is evidence suggesting that educators may avoid talking about race and racial issues because they either believe children are too young for such discussions [35,36], or that they may have concerns that such a discussion might be considered racist in itself [35]. While Bethany's reason for ignoring Levi was not clear, it is possible that it could be indicative of her holding similar beliefs or concerns.

Interestingly, the contrast between the response of Louise and of Bethany suggests that educators may be more confident to talk about race when the talk is initiated by a child from a minority background. However, as there are only these two isolated examples from this study, more research is needed to investigate this aspect of practice.

4. Summary

In summary, this study identified key concerns regarding the availability and use of children's literature to address principles of diversity. The children in this study had limited access to books portraying inclusive and authentic cultural diversity; this was related to and impacted by educators' restricted understanding and confidence regarding the selection and use of children's literature as a resource for meeting principles related to cultural diversity. The interrelationships of the limited book collections and the educator understandings resulted in practice that "othered" those from minority backgrounds.

5. Conclusions

This study has identified practice that consistently promotes monocultural viewpoints and the "othering" of those from minority cultural backgrounds. The potential impact on all children is of concern. For children to develop a strong sense of identity and an understanding and respect for others, it is important for them to see their own culture and those of others represented in authentic and contemporary ways and in multiple books [1,13,17,59]. The findings of this study indicate that such practice is currently absent or severely limited. Further, evidence suggests that children from dominant cultures can

develop an inflated sense of importance when the consistent promotion of monocultural viewpoints leads to a sense of 'White' being normal and of greater value [1,35,59]. Such attitudes can, in turn, contribute to prejudice and discrimination.

6. Recommendations

The findings of this study have implications for early childhood educators and for those who train educators, develop policy, design, implement and accredit curriculum and recommend practice. In order to see changes that will result in more effective use of children's literature to address and meet principles of diversity, several factors need to be addressed.

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

Educator understandings related to valuing and addressing diversity principles need to be developed. Findings from this study clearly indicate that educators' current understanding and attitudes towards addressing diversity principles are not conducive to effective practice. Educators may need access to further training in cultural competency to address this need. Such training should include the selection and use of authentic culturally diverse books. One way to address this is for the education of childcare educators to include both cultural training and exploration of authentic multicultural children's literature to assist in building their cultural and intercultural understandings and competencies. This will assist in their preparation for working with children from diverse backgrounds as well as supporting them in the selection and use of this type of literature in educational settings. Such training is likely to lead to improved understandings and confidence that could translate into practices that would benefit all children.

7. Limitations

Although the researcher followed consistent and recommended protocols and used research informed measures to ensure a robust study, there were still some limitations. First, the use of kindergarten rooms in long day care centres, although providing the benefit of examining contexts which operate under similar structures, guidelines and policies, limited the sample as other kindergarten contexts such as those which were school or community based were not included. Therefore, the findings may not be as generalisable or transferable as they might have been had the sample included a more diverse range of kindergarten contexts.

Second, the relatively small size of the sample (21 educators from four centres) necessarily limits the generalisability of the findings. It could be argued, however, that the rigor of the study allows for implications to be relevant to similar contexts.

Finally, the observation period of five days in each context provided a snapshot of practice in each of these contexts and there is a possibility that this may not be indicative of the longer term and regular practices in these centres.

8. Future Research

Given the scope, limitations and findings of this study, recommendations can be made for future research which may provide deeper insights into how children's literature is, and can be used, to promote principles of diversity. Further studies could take the research into

differing educational contexts, including community and school-based kindergartens as well as other early learning environments such as early childhood classrooms in primary schools. Such research could also extend into longer time periods to gain insight into whether the findings in this study are indicative of longer term practice. Larger scale studies may provide more extensive data which would present a more extended picture.

Since this study was undertaken, some positive signs have emerged through movements such as the We Need Diverse Books Movement [60] and the publication and promotion of resources such as the Cultural Diversity Database [61] by the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature, with similar databases also available in other countries. Further research could investigate whether and to what extent these initiatives are impacting the use of children's literature to address principles of diversity.

Further studies should consider including the voices of children and their families to provide access to their emic perspectives.

In addition, studies that investigate other ways in which educators are addressing or promoting principles of cultural diversity would add valuable insight into how educators are supporting development and valuing of children's diverse backgrounds and identities.

Finally, this paper makes an important contribution to the field regarding the ways in which diversity is being addressed through book sharing in the participating centres. Other important outcomes of the larger study regarding the broader nature of book sharing in participating long day care centres are presented in another paper [62].

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